

POKETOWN PEOPLE



*PARABLES
IN BLACK*
ELIA MIDDLETON TYBOUT

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FRANK VER BECK

"'LONZY!'" SHE CRIED, "'WHUT 'BOUT DE BULL WHUT
RUSHES?'"

POKETOWN PEOPLE

OR

PARABLES IN BLACK

BY

ELLA MIDDLETON TYBOUT

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR

BY FRANK VERBECK
AND BEULAH S. MOORE



PHILADELPHIA & LONDON
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

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I RECALL WITH AFFECTION CERTAIN
DARK-SKINNED FRIENDS OF MY CHILD-
HOOD, WHOSE PATIENCE AND UNFAILING
KINDNESS ENDEARED THEM TO ME THEN
AND DESERVE RECOGNITION FROM ME
NOW. THESE SKETCHES ARE SIMPLY
INTENDED TO DEPICT THE NEGRO AS I
HAVE KNOWN HIM OR HER WITH
THEIR ECCENTRICITIES, SUPERSTITIONS,
STRANGE CODE OF MORALITY, AND
CURIOS PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF
RELIGION TO EVERY-DAY LIFE. THE
HIGHER EDUCATION OF THE NEGRO IS
FAST OBLITERATING THE TYPES I HAVE
DESCRIBED. THERE ARE STILL SOME
LEFT, HOWEVER, AND TO THEM, AND
THE MEMORY OF OTHERS WHO HELPED
TO MAKE MY CHILDHOOD HAPPY,
I DEDICATE THIS LITTLE VOLUME

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I

THE OFFENDING EYE

BROTHER NOAH HYATT, one of the chief pillars of the church, a member of the Sessions, a leader of class-meeting, and especially gifted in exhortation, had a certain peculiarity which was a matter of comment in Poketown. This was his apparent ability to fix one eye sternly upon an objective point while the other rolled independently about, seeking for new worlds to conquer. The stationary orb was light blue, while its roving companion was brown.

Brother Jacob Sutton was pondering upon this eccentricity of nature as the two men walked home from class-meeting one Friday night, and at last sum-

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moned courage to give utterance to his thoughts.

“Hit jes’ entah meh mine, Brothah Hyatt,” he remarked casually, “tuh wondah huccum yo’ haid tuh suppoht a blue eye on de lef’ an’ a brown eye on de right. Hit done make yo’ ‘peah pow’ful exting’ished, tuh be sho’. Does yo’ know huccum de Lawd tuh favah yo’ dat a-way?”

The brown eye of Brother Hyatt flashed angrily, in direct opposition to the pleasant smile of the blue member of the firm.

“Reckon He done hit fuh de same reason He tuck an’ favah yo’ wid one straight laig an’ one bow laig,” he returned indifferently, and Brother Sutton felt impelled to change the subject.

“De case o’ James Pollahd am gwine tuh be laid befo’ de chu’ch nex’ class night,” he remarked hastily; “yo’

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'membahs dat he done tuck a paiah o' pants f'om de Jew sto' on Main Street, an' dey come an' 'rested him 'caze dey seen him gwine tuh chu'ch in 'em."

"Dem plaid pants done lay him low fo' sho'," said Brother Hyatt reflectively.

"'Peahs like, bein' ez he done wuck out he time in jail, de sin am spashiated 'nuff," hinted Brother Sutton, who was inclined to be lenient.

"Ef plaid pants am de undoin' o' James Pollahd," said Brother Hyatt unctuously, "den he got tuh stick tuh plain goods. Sich am de konsekinses o' vanity."

"Po' James! 'Peahs like I kin see him now, standin' up in dem pants an' givin' in he sperience fuh de old yeah when dey tuck an' 'rested' him," said Brother Sutton, indulging in momentary retrospection.

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“De chu’ch,” said Brother Hyatt severely as he paused at his own gate, “am obligated tuh sterminate sich acks. Dem whut ’dulges in cuss wo’ds had ought tuh slit dey tongues; dem whut takes de goods o’ othahs had ought tuh chop dey han’s offen dey body.”

“Sof’ly, Brothah, sof’ly,” ejaculated Mr. Sutton.

“Dem am de wo’ds o’ de Book,” affirmed Brother Hyatt, focussing his wandering eye upon the hands of his companion, which involuntarily sought the privacy of his pockets. “Kin yo’ ahgify ’g’inst dat, Brothah Sutton?”

Brother Sutton could not. He therefore took his leave, and Mr. Hyatt entered his house and closed the door. Within those four walls he was monarch of all he surveyed, and he intended to remain so.

“Dem ez has ’scaped de clutches of a

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female woman, by de grace o' Gawd," he was wont to assert, "had bettah keep deyse'fs *tuh* deyse'fs, 'caze dey ain' no knowin' whut gwine *tuh* happen ef yo' gits *tuh* passin' de time o' day too frequent."

Almost simultaneously with closing the door he removed his left eye and placed it carefully in his waistcoat pocket, over the edge of which it smiled bravely on, a small blue island on a sea of white. The existence of this glass eye was the skeleton in the closet of Brother Hyatt, and he guarded the secret jealously. When bargaining for its purchase it had been suggested to him that perhaps brown would be a better choice than blue, owing to the prevailing custom of having such appendages to match when possible, but he had repudiated the suggestion with scorn.

"Whut yo' reckon I wants *tuh* git a

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brown eye fo'?" he demanded argumentatively. "Ain' I jes' done wo' one clean out? I's gwine tuh get a blue eye, dat's whut I's gwine tuh do."

And blue it was.

Going to his back door, Brother Hyatt opened it and surveyed the landscape. The quiet of an August night reigned supreme, and overhead the moon shone with enticing brilliancy. Beyond two adjoining fields an irregular dark outline was plainly visible. It was the water-melon patch of a neighboring truck farm.

Brother Jacob Sutton, after leaving his companion, paused at his own residence to procure an empty grain-sack. When one hunts one naturally carries a game-bag. Brother Sutton was bent on a still-hunt, and wished to be properly equipped.

"De speckled pullet ovah tuh de fahm



BROTHER HYATT SURVEYED THE LANDSCAPE.



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mus' be 'bout at de fryin' aige now," he reflected as he climbed the fence.

And the speckled pullet, with several companions, soon fluttered uneasily in the seclusion of the grain-bag.

"Mought ez well come home thu de watahmillion patch," he reflected, his errand accomplished to his satisfaction.

The dew lay thick upon the vines, glistening brightly in the light of the moon, and scattered closely about the field were the melons themselves, large and luscious, and most tempting to the palate.

"Ovah in de cohnah by de crick," ruminated Mr. Sutton, "de sun shine wahmes' an' de fruit tas'e sweetes'."

Accordingly he repaired to the corner by the creek, bent upon refreshment of the inner man, but someone was before him. Brother Sutton hesitated an instant, then approached boldly.

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“James Pollahd,” he exclaimed sternly, “whut yo’ doin’ hyah?”

James Pollard, he of the plaid trousers, turned apprehensively around, then gave vent to a relieved chuckle.

“Clah tuh goodness,” he remarked, “I done thunk hit wuh ole man Noahy Hyatt.”

“James,” said Brother Sutton solemnly, “yo’ done lef’ de jail yistidday; is yo’ gwine tuh zume evil ackshuns ‘mej’ate?”

The unhappy James entered into a rambling explanation of his reasons for the nocturnal expedition, but the attention of his companion wandered perceptibly as his eyes became fixed upon the partly consumed fruit at his feet.

“James,” he interrupted suddenly, “*am she ripe?*”

Over the brow of the hill now appeared a third figure, walking slowly and

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stooping now and then to tap a melon inquiringly with thumb and finger.

“Pow’ful quare,” he muttered; “I done make meh mahk on de top so’s dey wouldn’ be no trubble ’bout it. I done mahked it wid a cross an’ ’lowed I’d come tuh-night an’ git it.”

Brother Hyatt paused in his search and listened intently. He heard a murmur of voices, which gradually grew more distinct. Hastily his hand sought his waistcoat pocket and fumbled there unavailingly: his eye was gone.

A famous general has said that the best mode of defence is by attack, and it is apparently true that great minds run in the same channels, for Brother Noah Hyatt promptly advanced to meet the enemy, with one hand held over the empty eyesocket and the other raised in stern denunciation.

“Brothah Sutton,” he exclaimed,

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“whut yo’ aftah, Brothah Sutton?
Whuh yo’ ’ligion, Brothah Sutton, whuh
yo’ ’ligion?”

Mr. Sutton pointed towards his companion, guiltily trembling at his side, clad in the identical plaid trousers which had occasioned his downfall, purchased and presented by a sympathizing friend upon his release from prison.

“I come hyah, Brothah Hyatt,” he responded loftily, “tuh snatch de brand f’om de burnin’. I done come tuh wras’le wid dis Son o’ Sin an’ Wickedness, an’ tuh keep he feet f’om strayin’ whuh dey done strayed befo’.”

“Hope tuh die,” stammered the wretched James, visions of the county jail rising vividly before his mind’s eye, —“hope tuh die, Brothah Hyatt, I ain’ done nawthin’. He tuck an’ eat ez much ez me.”

“James,” said Brother Sutton in

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tones of patient reproach, “I zorts yo’ not tuh add lyin’ tuh yo’ crap o’ sins. Yo’s got ’nuff tuh spashiate an’ tuh sterminate ’thout dat, James.”

“Ax him whut he got in he baig,” muttered James, his knees knocking together as he encountered the brown eye of Brother Hyatt fixed upon him,—“ax him whut he got in he baig.”

Brother Sutton shifted the bag to the other shoulder, and its occupants stirred uneasily as he did so.

“I got mus’rats in meh baig,” returned Mr. Sutton promptly. “I done been down tuh de crick aftah mus’rats.”

Mr. Hyatt passed to the rear and squeezed the bag between his hands; a muffled squawk resulted from the pressure.

“ ‘Peahs like de lanwidge o’ mus’rats done been changed sence yistidday,’ ” he remarked dryly as he replaced his hand

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before his eye and resumed his former location.

“Whut yo’ doin’ hyah yo’se’f, Brothah Hyatt?” inquired Mr. Sutton, rallying sufficiently to return the attack.
“Kin yo’ splain yo’ own ackshuns?”

Brother Hyatt saw his way of escape and took immediate advantage of it.

“Brothah Sutton,” he replied, “I done come hyah ’caze ole Satan he beckon me; dat’s huccum me tuh be hyah. He done drug me ovah de fence an’ tuck an’ p’nted out de ripes’ million in de patch. I sets meh eye on hit, Brothah Sutton, I sets meh eye on hit, an’ I wants hit, y-a-a-s, I wants hit pow’-ful bad. I couldn’t git meh eye f’om offen hit nohow; de zire growed an’ swelled in meh buzzom twell I feel fit tuh bus’. Whut yo’ think I done, Brothah Sutton, whut yo’ think I done?”

“Reckon yo’ tuck an’ cut de million,”

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said Brother Sutton, speaking as from experience.

“No, sah,” returned Brother Hyatt piously, “I didn’ do dat nohow. I ’membahs de wo’ds o’ de Book, ‘if yo’ eye offen’ yo’, pluck hit out an’ cas’ hit f’om yo’,’ an’ dat’s whut I done, Brothah Sutton, dat’s whut I done.”

He dramatically removed his hand at the concluding word, and the eyelid collapsed into the cavernous socket presented for inspection. The two men gasped with astonishment, and Brother Hyatt resumed:

“She come out pow’ful hahd,” he said pathetically; “dem roots wuh sho’ly in good an’ tight, but I kep’ a-pullin’,—y-a-a-s, I kep’ a-pullin, ’caze I ain’ gwine tuh suppoht no onruly membahs tuh my body. No, sah! I’s gwine tuh cas’ ’em f’om me. An’ aftah I done fling dat sinful blue eye intuh de crick de Lawd come

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down in a ch'iot o' fiah an' stanched de bleedin' an' tuck away de huht. He sez tuh me, sez He, 'Well done, Noahy Hyatt!' sez He."

"I nevah hyah no sperience de ekil o' dat," said Mr. Sutton in awestruck tones.

"Does yo' still hone fuh de million, Brothah Hyatt?" inquired James Pollard curiously.

"James," said Brother Hyatt severely, "I tells yo' mighty solemn dat ef yo' reaches out yo' han' tuh tech dem millions (whut don' b'long tuh yo'), yo's gwine tuh see a' Eye lookin' at yo'. Dat Eye am wotchin' yo' cyahful, an' yo' kaint hide f'om hit nohow. Has yo' disremembah 'bout de All-Pervadin' Eye, Brothah Sutton? Huccum you do dat? Huccum yo', Brothah Sutton? Hit done been spyin' aftah yo' dis night. De Session am gwine tuh hyah 'bout dem

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mus'rats, sho's yo' bawn. Dey's some-body sides James Pollahd fo' de chu'ch tuh deal wid, Brothah Sutton."

With which concluding remark Mr. Hyatt turned and walked majestically away, complete master of the situation.

"James," said Mr. Sutton reproachfully when they were alone, "yo' didn' have no call tuh 'trac' 'tention tuh de baig, nohow."

"Has yo' got mus'rats in dat baig, sho' 'nuff?" asked James, who was an inquiring youth.

"I leaves yo' hyah, James, tuh yo' own 'fleckshuns; aftah whut yo' done 'pinionated 'bout dis baig, I reckon I don' wan' yo' s'ciety home nohow."

So saying, Brother Sutton walked sorrowfully off. His heart was heavy within him, owing to the unfortunate contretemps, and his soul was awed with the Spartan resistance of Brother Hyatt

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to the prompting of the devil. Gradually, however, he succumbed to the witchery of his surroundings and forgot everything but the fact that it was pleasant to be alive and to wander at will in a watermelon patch alone in the moonlight.

“Reckon I mought ez well tote one home tuh ‘Cindy,’ ” he reflected, and looked about him preparatory to a careful selection. The dew shone white and sparkling upon the dark-green rind of his choice; it was necessary to push aside some leaves to find the stem, and Brother Sutton did so. With a loud yell of terror he jumped up and started to run, but caught his foot in the tangle of melon vines and fell heavily forward.

“De Eye!” he gasped, “de Eye!”
And, indeed, beneath the sheltering leaves a stern blue eye lay upon the

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ground and gazed up at him in silent accusation.

The countenance of Mr. Sutton was covered with an ashen bloom of fright, and large drops of perspiration stood out upon his brow as he stared fixedly at it, quite motionless from its irresistible magnetism. He felt it incumbent upon him to follow the example of Brother Hyatt, yet shrank weakly from the pruning process.

“Lawd,” he gasped, moistening his trembling lips, “I knows whut yo’ spec’s me tuh take an’ do. Meh eyes done res’ ‘pon de million, but, O Lawd, ‘tain’t one eye no mo’ den t’othah. How I gwine tuh git ‘long ef dey’s bofe cas’ out? I done seen hit lookin’ up at me; I done seen dat Wotchful Eye, Lawd, dat yo’ keeps tuh sick on wicked pussons. Y-a-a-s, oh, y-a-a-s, I done seen it plain as day.”

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Here his breath failed for an instant, and the chickens in the bag upon his back stirred slightly.

“I’s gwine tuh give dem chickins back, good Lawd,” continued the uncertain voice; “I don’ ‘peah tuh cyah ‘bout ‘em nohow.”

He sat cautiously upright and fumbled at the neck of the bag, finally shaking his prisoners out one by one.

“Git home,” he cried, heading off first one and then another, as they rushed madly about after the manner of all chickens; “shoo! git outen meh sight. Shoo!”

The speckled pullet, spreading her wings until they touched the ground, started for home on the double-quick, followed by her companions, all squawking loudly. And Brother Sutton, with a hasty but apprehensive glance behind him, did likewise.

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Now James Pollard, when left alone beside the creek, pondered thoughtfully upon the events of the evening without arriving at any definite conclusion; he was sadly puzzled.

“Ole man Noahy Hyatt nevah done pull out dat eye hisse’f nohow,” he said aloud. “Yit, huccum dat hole in he haid?”

James scratched his own head thoughtfully as he finally started homeward. Heading wildly down the hill, and scuttling as though for their lives, came the speckled pullet and company.

“De mus’rats makin’ fuh dey roos,” remarked James as he stood aside to let them pass, and then continued on his way, wondering greatly.

Observing what seemed to be an especially fine melon, he paused and bent over to examine it. What was that looking up at him from among the dark

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leaves? James's heart was in his mouth for a minute; then, gathering his courage together, he made the effort of his life, and putting forth a cautious finger touched the object, with fear and trembling at first, and then with curiosity and contempt.

James Pollard laughed long and loud as he disrespectfully thrust the accusing eye in the pocket of the plaid trousers, then quietly cut the stem of the melon, placed it upon his shoulder, and proceeded on his way rejoicing until he reached the neighborhood of Brother Noah Hyatt, who sat in the shadow of an oak-tree refreshing himself with the produce of the field after the exhausting events of the night. He deeply regretted the loss of his eye, but felt that its absence would give him added prestige in class-meetings, therefore he bore it with fortitude.

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“I’s gwine tuh make ‘em dance Juba nex’ class-night,” he reflected as he cut a large piece directly out the heart of the melon; “jes’ let me git aftah ‘em befo’ de Session.”

“I done pick up whut yo’ drap a ways back,” said the voice of James Pollard from behind the tree as he produced the glass eye. The lower jaw of Mr. Hyatt dropped with astonishment and he was speechless; James was quite at his ease.

“I don’ like dem stripy ones nohow,” he remarked, turning over a bit of the rind with his foot, “dis yeah’s de kine fuh me,” and he deposited his burden upon the ground. Brother Hyatt pointed at the blue eye, which seemed to possess a far-away, unfamiliar look.

“Huccum,” he gasped, “huccum——”

“Brothah Hyatt,” said James, “I knows all ‘bout yo’, an’ I’s pow’ful glad I does. I ain’ gwine to expose yo’ hum-

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buggery, 'caze I wants tuh git back intuh de bes' s'ciety of Poketown. Ef yo' he'ps me, I he'ps yo."

James paused and looked searchingly at his companion.

"Ef de chu'ch take an' hol' out huh ahms tuh me, Brothah Hyatt, an' fuhgit de plaid pants an' de jail; ef de best s'ciety in Poketown am zorted tuh open de do' tuh me, I reckon de Lawd mought wuck a merrycle an' a' eye mought up an' spring out same ez Jonah's gourd tuck an' growed in a night. 'Peahs like tuh me," added James enticingly, "I kin see hit sproutin' now."

"James," said Brother Hyatt, rising, "come home wid me an' go intuh meh back do'. De Lawd done favah yo' wid secon' sight, James."

There was a full attendance the next class-night, rumors of an unusual and in-

THE OFFENDING EYE

teresting nature having excited the curiosity of Poketown to its highest point.

Brother Hyatt rose to address the meeting, and a stifled exclamation came from Brother Jacob Sutton, who half rose to his feet, then sat down again.

“Brothah Sutton,” said Brother Hyatt impressively, “I calls on yo’ fo’ yo’ sperience las’ Friday night, jes’ aftah I done pull out meh lef’ eye an’ cas’ hit f’om me ‘caze hit res’ too long on de goods o’ othahs,—las’ Friday night, Brothah Sutton, when yo’ done went aftah mus’rats. Tell de chu’ch I’s speechifyin’ de truf ’bout dat eye.”

And Brother Sutton, in faltering accents, testified that he had met and conversed with Brother Hyatt when the eye was lacking. A thrill ran through the congregation as the story progressed with graphic details.

“James Pollahd,” said Brother

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Hyatt, as Brother Sutton resumed his seat, “yo’ done seen dat eye resto’ed tuh meh haid. Speak up now an’ give in yo’ sperience.”

“Me an’ Brothah Hyatt,” said Mr. Pollard, “wuh settin’ on he do’-step an’ he wuh p’intin’ out de way tuh heav’n tuh a po’ sinnah like me, when dey come a light, same ez de light when de meule stables on de towpath tuck fiah.”

“Y-a-a-s! dey come a light. Praise Gawd!” interpolated Brother Hyatt.

“An’ I done hyah a Voice outen de middle o’ de light,” resumed James; “hit say, ‘Brothah Hyatt, de Lawd am pleased wid yo’. Hyah am yo’ eye back ag’in, good ez new.’ ”

“An’ den I done feel a ticklin’ way back in de roots,” said Brother Hyatt, taking up the thread of the discourse, “an’ somethin’ come a-bulgin’ an’ a-srouchin’ outen meh haid—glory!

THE OFFENDING EYE

glory! hallelujah!—outen meh haid in-tuh de hole. Glory!”

“De light done fade,” said James solemnly, “an’ I up an’ sez tuh Brothah Hyatt, I sez, ‘Yo’ got yo’ same ole eye back ag’in,’ I sez.”

“But ‘twa’n’t de same ole eye,” interrupted Brother Hyatt, “’caze I done see diff’unt wid hit. Dis hyah eye done been in glory, an’ de way hit see now am de right way fo’ sho’. Hit done tell me plain whut am de duty o’ de chu’ch to’ds hits wanderin’ lambs. I axes yo’, meh brothahs an’ meh sistahs, tuh welcome back James Pollahd tuh yo’ midst; I zorts yo’ tuh open yo’ do’s wide tuh him.”

Brother Hyatt reached for the hand of James Pollard and led him forward before the pulpit.

“Brothah Sutton,” he said, fixing that trembling gentleman with his brown

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eye, "I knows dat you's gwine tuh be 'mongst de fust tuh welcome Brothah Pollahd back tuh de ahms o' de chu'ch."

But Brother Sutton shook his head solemnly and rose, as though to protest.

"Brothah Sutton," admonished Brother Hyatt, "'tain't no time tuh speechify 'bout mus'rats; I sho'ly would hate tuh be obligated tuh tell all I knows 'bout 'em dis night. Step up, Brothah Sutton, an' welcome de lamb back tuh de fole; step up lively now, an' set de zample tuh de res' o' de Session."

And Brother Sutton stepped.

II

BROTHER JOHNSING'S SPERIENCE

“An’ all true b’lievahs o’ de wo’d o’ de Lawd am axed tuh be in dey places on nex’ Chuesday night at de wotch-meetin’. We’s a-gwine tuh wotch de Ole Yeah out an’ de New Yeah in, an’ I hopes dat many will be moved by de Sperrit tuh give in dey sperience on dat solemn ’casion.

“Befo’ we j’ines in singin’ de las’ hymn we’ll pass roun’ de hat onct mo’, and ’tain’t no mannah o’ use fuh de young men on de back benches tuh be aidgin’ to’ds de do’, ’caze it am locked.”

So saying, Brother Eli Wiggins, pastor of Little Bethel, Poketown’s principal church, wiped his brow with his red bandanna and sat down. He had been

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eloquent indeed that morning, and his face glistened with beads of perspiration, the result of his efforts to point out to his flock the straight and narrow way.

The congregation slowly dispersed, discussing the watch-meeting as they walked down the one long, straggling street which composed the settlement known as Poketown and inhabited solely by the African race.

“I wondah now,” remarked Aunt Martha Young reflectively, as she paused at her front gate for a few last words, “ef Brothah Sam’l Johnsing’s gwine tuh come tuh de wotch-meetin’. Has yo’ spoke wid him lately, Uncl’ William?”

“Yo’ ain’ got no call tuh give him de name o’ brothah, Aun’ Ma’thy,” replied Uncle William Stafford, shaking his gray head impressively. “I’s feard dat Sam’l Johnsing am backslidin’ too fas’

BROTHER JOHNSING

tuh evah git redemption. 'Peahs like ole Satan done got hol' him ag'in good an' tight, an' I reckon he's gwine tuh keep him dis time."

"We's gwine tuh miss him at de wotch-meetin' when it comes tuh givin' in speriences. *Mistah Johnsing* am pow'ful gifted in dat line," said Aunt Martha with a decided emphasis on the prefix.

"I done hyah tell," remarked Aunt Janty Gibbs, who shared with the first two speakers the rights of seniority in Poketown, "I done hyah tell dat he say he kin splain it all ef he gits a chance."

"Splain it all, kin he?" said Aunt Martha with an indignant snort. "I'd like tuh hyah him splain leavin' his wife wid dat passel o' chillen tuh suppo't an' settin' up tuh co't de yallah gal f'om de Crossroads right undah huh nose. I'd like tuh hyah him splain dat."

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“Dat’s so, Aun’ Ma’thy, dat’s so,” said Uncle William approvingly. “He mought tell easy ’nuff huccum dat speckled pullet undah his coat; he mought make us b’lieve dat it’s rheumatiz ’bliges him tuh keep dat black bot-tle in his pocket; an’ he mought tell us huccum dat one-eyed shoat o’ hisn so like de one dat’s missin’ f’om my pen, but he can’t splain leavin’ his wife like he done; he can’t splain dat nohow.”

When the night of the watch-meeting arrived Poketown turned out hand-somely; among others appeared Mr. Samuel Johnson boldly escorting the yellow girl from the Crossroads and apparently oblivious of indignant glances cast upon him from all directions. Brother Wiggins rose to address the meeting.

“Hit am meh painful duty,” he said, after the opening hymn had been lined

BROTHER JOHNSING

out and sung with much gusto, “tuh look ovah de faces befo’ me an’ separate de wheat f’om de chaff; de sheep f’om de goats.”

An uneasy rustle pervaded the congregation, as though many were in doubt regarding the class to which they belonged.

“De true an’ faithful,” resumed the pastor, “will set in de benches on de right han’. Dem as has nevah got ’ligion will set in de middle row of benches, and we’ll labah wid ’em an’ hope de sperrit o’ de Lawd will move dey hahts to-night. But dem as has onct got ’ligion an’ back-slid, dem as is walkin’ ahm-in-ahm wid Satan, an’ dem as is indulgin’ in scan-lous conduc’, will set in de benches on de lef’-han’ side. Dat dey sha’n’t be no mistake, an’ no chance o’ de sheep gittin’ mixed up wid de goats, I’ll call de names o’ de faithful fust; den de onregin’rit.

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Dem as is lef' uncalled knows whut dey is 'thout no mo' wo'ds f'om me, an' will go whah dey b'longs."

This classification filled the benches on the right to overflowing; it also crowded the middle row somewhat uncomfortably with the youth of the congregation, among them the yellow girl from the Crossroads; while quite alone in the left-hand benches, calm and undisturbed, sat Mr. Samuel Johnson—a solitary goat. And the meeting proceeded as usual.

The first hour or two were devoted to alternate prayers and hymns, instigated by one or the other of the congregation, but as ten o'clock approached Brother Wiggins again arose for a few remarks.

"De houah am come," he announced in solemn accents, "fuh me tuh ax' yo' all tuh 'membah whut yo's hyah fo'; de time am rollin' roun'—"

BROTHER JOHNSING

“Roll, Jordan, roll,” shouted an excitable sister.

The refrain was taken up by all present, and the hymn sung through from beginning to end.

“De Ole Yeah am mighty nigh gone,” continued the preacher, when he could make himself heard, “we ain’ got but two houahs lef’ befo’ de New Yeah am gwine tuh be ‘mongst us. It’s a-smilin’ an’ a-beckonin’ tuh us now. De New Yeah am pow’ful ’ceitful, meh brothahs; it am sayin’ tuh yo’ dat its ways am broad an’ easy walkin’, ’thout no stony places, er mud puddles tuh wet yo’ feet. It am a-callin’ tuh yo’, ‘Come on, meh frien’s, I’s gwine tuh make it smooth travellin’ fuh yo’.’

“Don’ yo’ b’lieve it, meh brothahs; don’ yo’ trus’ it, meh sistahs. Huccum one yeah different f’om anothah yeah? Tell me dat. Ain’ it de same ole sun

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a-risin' an' a-settin' dat was a-risin' an'
a-settin' las' yeah? Ain' it de same old
light an' dahkness, de same ole heat an'
col'? An' mo' en all, ain' it de same ole
moon a-smirkin' an' a-smilin' up dah in
de sky? Tell me dat. Ain' it de same
ole moon dat's drawed many intuh trub-
ble befo' dey knowed it?"

"Amen. Dat's so," arose from the
benches on the right.

"Bewhah o' de moon, meh brothahs;
tuhn yo' backs tuh it, meh sistahs, 'spe-
cially de spring an' summah moon.
Dat's de time tuh wotch an' pray. It am
pow'ful easy tuh do right wintah nights
when de kitchin stove am buhnin' hot,
an' yo' feet gits fros'-bit ef yo' goes out-
side, but when de spring comes creepin'
on yo', wid de frogs a-croakin' in de
ditches, an' de breezes blowin' sof' ovah
yo', how 'bout dat? Kin yo' 'membah de
Commandmints when de harves' moon

BROTHER JOHNSING

am hangin' in de sky, big an' raid?
When de smell o' de wil' grape fills yo'
nose, an' de katydids am callin' tuh yo'
—how 'bout dat? When yo' heels am
lightah den yo' haid, an' somethin' sends
de blood a-chasin' thu yo' veins—how
'bout dat? When de cawn am standin'
in de shocks, an' de watahmillions am
a-layin' on de vines, fit tuh bus' wid ripe-
ness an' glistenin' wid de dew—how
'bout dat? Does yo' 'membah de Com-
mandmints den?"

He paused for breath and closely
scanned the faces before him.

"De time am passin,'" he resumed,
"de Ole Yeah am mos' gone. Ain' yo'
got nothin' tuh say, meh frien's? Is yo'
gwine tuh shake han's wid de New Yeah
'thout givin' in no sperience tuh he'p
yo' git thu it? Uncl' William Staffo'd,
yo's de oldest membah hyah, ain' yo' got
nothin' tuh say? Aun' Janty Gibbs,

POKETOWN PEOPLE

huccum de sperrit not tuh move yo' dis las' night? Ain' de Lawd done nothin' fuh nobody dis yeah 'cept whut dey's 'shamed tuh mention?"

Uncle William Stafford rose slowly to his feet.

"Brothah Wiggins," he said impressively, "I feels it meh juty to tell yo' dat dey won' be no speriences guv in dis evenin'. When I done hyah tell dat Mistah Sam'l Johnsing wuh gwine tuh be hyah tuh-night, bol' ez brass wid all his backslidin' onrepented, I was 'stonished, dat's whut I was—'stonished, an' I didn' feel like comin' hyah nohow. But I didn' trus' mehse'f, Brothah Wiggins; no, suh, dat's whut I didn'. I done went tuh see Aun' Ma'thy Young, an' we insulted an' insulted ovah de mattah; den we axed in Aun' Janty Gibbs, an' *she* insulted, an' we done come tuh de seclusion dat ef yo' 'lowed de snake in

BROTHER JOHNSING

de pusson o' Mistah Sam'l Johnsing tuh entah de meetin' dis evenin', dah shouldn' be no speriences guv in by dem as tries tuh keep dey feet f'om slippin' f'om de path dat Abraham, Isaac, an' Jacob done set fuh us tuh walk in. Dat's all, Brothah Wiggins."

Uncle William sat down with much dignity, and Aunt Janty Gibbs took the floor.

"Whut Uncl' William done say," she remarked, "am gospel truf. Dey won' be no movin' o' de sperrit ez long ez Mistah Johnsing sets up dah so biggaty an' brazen. Ef he kin splain 'bout leavin' his wife and fambly tuh shif' fuh deyse'fs an' 'bout de way he's been gwine on lately, now's de time fuh him tuh up an' do it; ef he can't splain dis nohow, now's de time fuh him tuh git outen de sight o' 'speckable folks. Dat's de seclusion we's all come tuh, Brothah

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Wiggins, an' dey won' be no movin' o' de sperrit ez long ez dat low-lived niggah sets up in dat bench 'thout sayin' nothin'."

Aunt Janty resumed her seat amid a low murmur of approval. Brother Wiggins was somewhat embarrassed as to the proper course to pursue.

"Mistah Johnsing," he said at last, "yo' done hyah whut Brothah William Staffo'd an' Sistah Janty Gibbs has said. Whut yo' got tuh say fo' yo'se'f, Mistah Johnsing; whut yo' got tuh say?"

Mr. Johnson remained silent, smiling inscrutably, while the yellow girl from the Crossroads fidgeted uneasily in her seat. Brother Wiggins made a last pathetic appeal.

"Does yo' 'membah whut night it am, Mistah Johnsing?" he inquired. "Don' yo' wan' tuh entah de New Yeah wid clean han's an' feet an' yo' backslidin'

BROTHER JOHNSING

confessed an' washed away? 'Membah,
po' sinnah, dat even ef yo' sins be scah-
let dey kin be made whitah dan snow.'

"Whitah dan snow; yes, whitah dan snow,
Wash me, an' I shall be whitah dan snow,"

sang Aunt Martha Young, rocking her-
self back and forth, while the hymn was
taken up by one after another until the
roof rang with the refrain,—

"Wash me, an' I shall be whitah dan snow."

As the last notes died away Mr. Sam-
uel Johnson arose.

"Brothah Wiggins," he began, "de
sperrit o' de Lawd am wuckin' inside
me tuh-night, an' I'd like tuh give in
meh sperience befo' de New Yeah am
'mongst us."

"Precede, Mistah Johnsing, precede,"
said the preacher.

"De Ole Yeah done treat me mighty

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mean in some ways," he continued, "but I's done de bes' I could, 'co'din' tuh meh lights, an' I'd like tuh splain tuh yo', Brothah Wiggins, dat when I wuh exposed tuh be meanderin' in de valley o' wickedness, ahm-in-ahm wid de devil, de truf was dat I was jes' chasin' aftah one po' li'l ewe lamb dat had strayed f'om de fol', an' zortin' of huh tuh come back."

An indignant rustle pervaded the congregation, which Brother Wiggins silenced by a wave of his hand.

"Splain yo'se'f, Mistah Johnsing, splain yo'se'f," he said with dignity; "we's waitin' tuh hyah huccum yo' ack like yo' done, an' de time am passin'. Splain yo'se'f, Mistah Johnsing."

"Brothah Wiggins," said Mr. Johnson impressively, "yo' done make refunce tuh de moon in yo' speechifyin' tuh-night. Whut yo' done say am gos-

BROTHER JOHNSING

pel truf. It am de moon, Brothah Wiggins, an' 'specially de harves' moon, dat am 'sponsible fuh many things. Huccum yo' know so much 'bout de moon, Brothah Wiggins? Has yo' felt it wuckin' inside yo' in de silence o' de night?"

"Yo's strayin' f'om de subjec', Mistah Johnsing, an' yo' time am gittin' shoht," said Brother Wiggins severely.

"De harves' moon," resumed Mr. Johnson, "ez everybody know, am full three nights."

"Reckon 'twa'n't no fullah dan yo' wuh," said a voice from the rear. It was the injured Mrs. Johnson, who occupied a seat near the door, surrounded by her offspring.

"On de firs' o' dese nights las' summah," he continued, without regarding the interruption, "ez I was comin' home f'om huskin' cawn an' walkin' 'long by

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de canal, I seen somethin' on de tow-path befo' me. It wuh a gal dancin' tuh de music o' de 'cordeen dat somebody in de bushes wuh playin'. 'Who dat?' sez I. 'Come dance,' sez she, holdin' out huh skirt wid one han' an' huh feet twinklin' in de moonlight. 'Come dance,' sez she. Brothah Wiggins, I ain' 'ceivin' of yo'. I ain' tryin' tuh scuse meh conduc'; no suh, I's tellin' yo' de truf. De light o' de moon wuh in meh haid; de music o' de 'cordeen got intuh meh feet, an' befo' I knowed it I wuh on de tow-path wid meh ahm roun' de wais' o' dat yallah gal I nevah seen befo'.'"

"Reckon 'twa'n't so much de light o' de moon in yo' haid ez de feel o' de apple-jack yo' done tuck intuh yo' stum-mick," proclaimed Mrs. Johnson from the rear.

"Sistah Johnsing, hol' yo' peace," said the pastor; "let him precede."

BROTHER JOHNSING

“De nex’ night,” resumed Mr. Johnson, “I come home by way o’ de tow-path ag’in, an’ I tuck meh fiddle wid me, so’s I could play fuh huh tuh dance. An’ de thu’d night, ez I wuh a-fiddlin’ away an’ she wuh a-dancin’ in de light o’ de moon, sho’s yo’ bawn, Brothah Wiggins, I seen de wo’d SIN in lettahs o’ fiah right ’cross meh fiddle.”

A sudden thrill ran through the congregation as they bent eagerly forward, intent on hearing every word. Mr. Johnson, after an impressive pause, continued:

“I done flung de fiddle intuh de canal, an’ stahted fuh home, but I wuh dat skeert meh knees trimbled undah me, ’caze I knowed ’twas de han’ o’ de Lawd done writ dat wo’d on meh fiddle, an’ I ’spected it wuh gwine tuh be laid on me pow’ful heavy in jedgmint.”

“Dat am a mighty movin’ sperience,”

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said Brother Wiggins thoughtfully, “an yo’ mus’ be specially favahed tuh have it happen tuh yo’.”

“Brothah Wiggins,” remarked Uncle William Stafford reflectively, “whut yo’ say am true; dat wuh a pow’ful movin’ sperience, but Mistah Johnsing mus’ of fuhgot tuh tell us huccum he tuh leave a lady like Sistah Johnsing hyah fuh a no’-count gal f’om de Crossroads.”

“Splain yo’se’f, Mistah Johnsing, splain yo’se’f,” said the preacher, “hucum yo’ tuh do dat?”

“Dat’s whut I’s gwine tuh do, Brothah Wiggins, when I kin hyah mehse’f speak,” replied Mr. Johnson, darting a withering glance in the direction of Uncle William Stafford. “Fuh some time I done keep away f’om de canal an’ come home ’cross de ma’sh, but I wa’n’t happy ’caze I kep’ thinkin’ o’ de gal I done lef’ by huhse’f on de tow-path

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'thout no wo'ds tuh tell huh 'bout de sin o' whut she wuh doin'. She done cas' a spell ovah me, Brothah Wiggins, dat's whut she done, an' I couldn't git away f'om it nohow."

"Wotch an' pray, Mistah Johnsing, wotch an' pray. Dat's whut yo' mus' do," admonished Brother Wiggins.

"Dat's jes' whut I done," returned Mr. Johnson, "an' den one night ez I wuh walkin' 'long de Dutch Neck road I done hyah a Voice callin' tuh me f'om de empty aiah. 'Sam'l Johnsing,' it say, 'Sam'l Johnsing;' 'Dat's me,' sez I, wid de sweat breakin' out all ovah me. 'Sam'l Johnsing,' it say ag'in, makin' three times, Brothah Wiggins, 'Sam'l Johnsing, huccum yo' leave dat gal on de tow-path 'thout p'intin' out tuh huh whuh she gwine when she dies ef she don' leave off dancin'? Huccum yo' do dat, Sam'l Johnsing?' "

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“Lies, all lies,” Mrs. Johnson was heard to mutter ominously.

“I done flop down on meh knees,” continued the narrator, “an ax de pusson speakin’ tuh me whut I mus’ do. Sho’s yo’ bawn, Brothah Wiggins, de Voice done ansuh back. ‘Sam’l Johnsing,’ it say, ‘go back tuh de canal an’ walk down de tow-path till yo’ fin’ dat yallah gal. Take huh by de han’ an’ zort wid huh; labah wid huh, Sam’l Johnsing, labah wid huh ev’ry evenin’ till she leave off huh scan’lous conduc’. Dat’s whut yo’ mus’ do, Sam’l Johnsing.’

“An’ dat’s whut I done, Brothah Wiggins. De Voice done say, ‘Keep a-walkin’ down de tow-path till yo’ fin’ huh;’ I done so. It say, ‘Take huh by de han’ an’ zort wid huh;’ I done so. It say, ‘Go dah ev’ry evenin’;’ I done so, Brothah Wiggins, I done so. Did she repent an’ tuhn huh back on de music o’

BROTHER JOHNSING

de 'cordeen an' de fiddle? No, suh, dat's whut she didn'. De mo' I zorted de mo' she laugh an' dance, till I done feel obligated tuh spen' mo' an' mo' time wid huh."

"De hahts o' some," said Brother Wiggins sympathetically, "am pow'ful hahd tuh move."

"At las,'" resumed Mr. Johnson, "jes' ez I wuh makin' up meh min' tuh let huh go huh own way, I done hyah de Voice ag'in. It say, 'De Lawd am angry wid yo', Sam'l Johnsing. Whuh dat stray lamb He done sont yo' out fuh tuh bring intuh de fol'?' I make ansuh dat I couldn't do no mo'. Den de Voice say, pow'ful loud an' strong, 'Yes, yo' kin, Sam'l Johnsing, yes, yo' kin. Leave yo' happy home fuh a while; leave de wife o' yo' buzzom,—de lady o' yo' 'fections,—tuh suppoh't de fambly. She kin do it, 'caze she am so pow'ful smaht an'

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hus'lin'. Yo's got tuh go live at de Crossroads an' snatch de brand f'om de buhnin'.' Den I axes, kin' o' weak like, whut mo' I got tuh do, an' de Voice done make ansuh, 'Spen' yo' money on huh, Sam'l Johnsing; spen' yo' money on huh. Dat's de way tuh tech huh haht.' "

The yellow girl from the Crossroads simpered consciously and instinctively touched some glittering ornaments pinned to her dress as Mr. Johnson continued:

"De Voice say tuh spen' meh money on huh; I done so. It say, 'Go live at de Crossroads;' I done so. 'Twa'n't easy fuh me, Brothah Wiggins, tuh leave meh wife and chillen. I done hyah whut's been said 'bout me in Poketown, but I fuhgive it all. I wuh wuckin' ovah a strayin' sistah, same ez I wuh tol' tuh do. I labahed early an' late, an' spent meh money lib'ral; she come high,

BROTHER JOHNSING

Brothah Wiggins, she come high, but we had tuh have huh, an' dah she am' safe an' soun' at las'. Meh duty am done; I's gwine back tuh meh home tuh-night, an' ef anybody hyah have got any mo' tuh say on de mattah, we'll argify outen de back yahd. Is yo' satisfied wid de wuck I's done fuh yo' chu'ch an' fo' yo', Brothah Wiggins? Does yo' think de New Yeah am gwine tuh fin' me wid clean han's an' a righteous sperrit?"

"*Brothah Johnsing*," said the pastor, with much emphasis, "I is. Yo's done noble; yo's lived yo' 'ligion in yo' life, not talked it wid yo' mouf. I's proud tuh know yo', *Brothah Johnsing*."

"Dat am meh sperience fuh de Ole Yeah, *Brothah Wiggins*," said Mr. Johnson modestly. "I done fotched de lamb intuh de fol', but it am yo' place tuh look aftah huh an' keep huh feet f'om strayin'. I 'vise yo', *Brothah Wiggins*,

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tuh zort huh tuh stay in de house on moonlight nights; dat's all."

"It am now twelve o'clock," said Brother Wiggins, as the bells pealed forth their greeting; "de New Yeah am wid us, meh frien's, an' I hopes dat when it am ovah yo's gwine tuh have ez much tuh yo' credit ez Brothah Johnsing have tuh his'n dis las' yeah. Me an' Brothah Johnsing's gwine tuh stan' side by side befo' de pulpit, an' de congregation am invited tuh shake han's wid us, an' wish us a Happy New Yeah."

"Sam'l Johnsing," said Uncle William Stafford, as he availed himself of the above-mentioned privilege, "yo's still got somethin' lef' tuh splain. Yo' an' me's gwine tuh argify 'bout dat one-eyed shoat tuh-morrow, Sam'l Johnsing."

"I'll be pleased tuh see yo', Uncl'

BROTHER JOHNSING

William," returned Mr. Johnson, smiling somewhat feebly.

"Brothah Johnsing," remarked Aunt Martha Young, "yo's got de gif' o' gab pow'ful slick, an' when I hyahs yo' talkin' I's 'bliged tuh b'lieve yo', spite o' mehse'f, but when I tuhns meh back, I ain' so sho', Brothah Johnsing, I ain' so sho'."

Last of all came Mrs. Johnson and family. As she laid her hand on her husband's arm in a proprietary manner a worried expression might have been observed in the eyes of Mr. Johnson.

"Come home wid me," she said in low but distinct accents, "come home wid me, Sam'l Johnsing, an' hyah *my* spe ri ence. I's gwine tuh tell it tuh yo' good an' strong. Den yo' kin splain yo' con due' ovah ag'in tuh me. I ain' got it intuh meh haid yit huccum de Lawd tuh give yo' sech pow'ful funny ordahs;

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maybe meh haid am thick, but I can't see it nohow. Come home an' splain."

"Go home wid yo' fambly, Brothah Johnsing," said the pastor, with the air of one who pronounces a benediction; "yo's airned de right tuh live peaceful an' happy. Go home rejoicin' wid de wife o' yo' buzzom, Brothah Johnsing."

Mrs. Johnson turned suddenly upon her husband as he slowly followed her towards the door.

"Tote de baby," she commanded, thrusting the heavy child into his reluctant arms, "tote de baby. I's tired, meh-se'f; I ain' gwine tuh do no mo' wuck till yo' splains so's I kin onderstan' yo' meanin'. Yo' ain' done dat yit, Sam'l Johnsing—not yit."

III

AN UNWILLING DELILAH

“Hit am pow’ful quare,” ejaculated Aunt Martha Young in troubled accents.

Aunt Janty Gibbs shook her head mournfully in response, and closed her lips tightly as though to repress the words trembling upon them.

“I’s knowed de day,” continued Aunt Martha, “when de benches wouldn’ hole de folks whut wanted tuh come tuh Little Bethel, no mattah how close we set.”

“Room tuh spaiah now,” said Aunt Janty gloomily.

There was trouble in Poketown directly traceable to the arrival of the new pastor at Zion Church. Hitherto Little Bethel had been the tabernacle of the élite of the village, and had tol-

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erated with haughty indifference the existence of a humble edifice across the bridge known as Zion and patronized by a few faithful spirits, chiefly from the surrounding country.

Little Bethel had a gracefully tapering steeple, and the ladies of the congregation were particular about wearing straw hats in summer and felt ones in winter; Zion had no steeple whatever, and the ladies who worshipped within its unplastered walls were fortunate if they had any hats at all, regardless of texture. The benches of Little Bethel were provided with backs, and the gentlemen of the congregation usually wore brightly polished, loudly creaking boots, and displayed the corner of a pocket-handkerchief artistically drooping from the pockets of their waistcoats; the benches of Zion were backless, and the gentlemen who sat thereon used grease

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instead of blacking on their boots,—when they had any,—and were ignorant of the advantages of pocket-handkerchiefs. In a word, Little Bethel did not associate with Zion; it was the invidious distinction of class.

It was therefore not surprising that Aunt Martha Young and Aunt Janty Gibbs, pillars of Little Bethel, viewed with consternation the expansion of Zion after the arrival of Brother Tyndal. Tyndal, Son of Thunder, he preferred to be called; it was the cognomen bestowed upon him because of his eloquence, and he felt he had earned it rightfully.

“I don’ see, nohow,” said Aunt Martha, continuing her remarks upon the scanty attendance at the evening service of Little Bethel, “I don’ see nohow whut’s gwine tuh be did ‘bout it.”

“Look at ‘em,” exclaimed Aunt Janty,

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resentfully, indicating the stream of people crossing the bridge and meandering slowly down the street, "dey done come f'om Zion!"

Judging from her tone, coming from Zion was equivalent to going to perdition.

Brother Tyndal passed, surrounded by an admiring coterie. He was a tall, slender young mulatto, whose most remarkable attribute appeared to be the thick black hair which reached well below his shoulders, and which he kept brushed until it stood out about his head like a glistening but bushy aureole. It was doubtful if an ordinary comb could penetrate the matted undergrowth beneath the shining exterior, but it was not fitting that the sheep of Zion should question the toilet of their shepherd. Close behind, but alone and unworshipped, followed Brother Wiggins, the once popu-

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lar pastor of Little Bethel. He paused to exchange a few words with his faithful adherents at the gate of Aunt Martha Young.

“Come in,” said that lady, hospitably opening her front door. “Brother Wiggins, now’s de time fo’ yo’ an’ me an’ Aun’ Janty tuh take an’ insult ovah dis hyah mattah o’ Zion. Dey ain’ gwine tuh be no Little Bethel lef’ ’cep’n us ef we don’ up an’ ack rapid-like.”

Brother Wiggins sank wearily into a chair and thrust his hands deep in his pockets. Walking home alone from his deserted church behind the triumphant Zionites had been to him a journey through the Valley of Humiliation.

“I dunno,” he said reflectively, “huc-cum Brothah Tyndal tuh git sich a hol’ ovah de lambs of Little Bethel.”

“I knows,” said Aunt Janty in the sepulchral tones of one who feels that

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the time has come to speak out. Her companions turned and looked at her in surprised inquiry, but she firmly maintained her position, nodding her head convincingly.

“Hit am he haiah,” she announced, and as she observed a puzzled expression on the faces of her auditors she repeated her remark a little louder.

“Splain yo’se’f, Aun’ Janty,” suggested Brother Wiggins, “splain yo’-se’f.”

“Brothah Tyndal,” said Aunt Janty mysteriously, “ain’ de fus’ man whut am beholden tuh de haiahs o’ he haid fuh de strongness an’ de ‘trackshuns of he pusson. ‘Membah Samson.’”

“Dat’s so, Aun’ Janty, dat’s so!” ejaculated Brother Wiggins in evident admiration.

“Sho’s yo’ bawn,” continued Aunt Janty, “hit am de haiah whut am ‘spon-

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sible. Kin yo' grow haiah like his'n, Brothah Wiggins?"

The gentleman addressed shook his head sadly. Nature having endowed Brother Wiggins with hirsute adornments which kinked tightly from the roots and covered his head like a skull-cap, it was manifestly impossible for him to compete with his rival in that respect. The three conspirators pondered uneasily; clearly the time for action had arrived. Something must be done.

"I knowed f'om de fus' dat he done got outside 'sistance," remarked Brother Wiggins vindictively; "reckon he tongue ain' quite ez slick ez he haiah, aftah all."

Aunt Martha had been recalling to the best of her ability the history of Samson, and had arrived at a definite conclusion.

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“Who gwine tuh take an’ cut it off?” she demanded abruptly.

The same question had risen to the lips of her companions, but had been repressed; they looked at one another inquiringly.

“Has yo’ got de Good Book handy, Aun’ Ma’thy?” inquired the preacher, and Aunt Martha producing it, the history of Samson was read aloud and commented upon.

“Hit wuh a lady whut done cut de haiah offen he haid,” said Brother Wiggins with evident relief. “She done ‘ticed him tuh go tuh sleep an’ up an’ tuck huh scissors outen huh pocket an’ snipped it off.”

“Humph,” said Aunt Janty, “s’long’s de haiah done git cut, hit don’ make no mattah who take an’ do de ack.”

“Hit am got tuh be cut by a lady,” repeated Brother Wiggins unctuously.

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“Dem am de wo’ds in de Book; ‘tain’ gwine tuh do no good fuh a man tuh go messin’ whuh he ain’ no use. Ef sich mattahs ain’ done reg’lah, whut’s de good o’ doin’ ‘em at all? Kin a man ‘tice a man? Tell me dat.”

This argument, being unanswerable, was passed over in silence.

“Whut kin yo’ do, Aun’ Ma’thy?” he resumed persuasively; “yo’s got a way wid yo’, Aun’ Ma’thy, dat am pow’ful takin’.”

Aunt Martha settled her ample form more comfortably in her chair.

“Reckon meh days fuh ‘ticemints an’ sich am ovah,” she said imperturbably.

Clearly Aunt Martha was not to be beguiled into personal action with regard to the hair of Brother Tyndal. Nor was Aunt Janty more encouraging, as the troubled eye of the preacher sought her face in evident anxiety; her shake

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of the head was final and decisive. As the trio again gravely considered the question, a shadow fell upon the window-shade.

“*Melindy!*” exclaimed Aunt Janty and Brother Wiggins in unison with evident relief.

“Everybody know,” said Brother Wiggins slowly, “dat when Melindy ‘swade no man kin’ ‘ny.”

“Dey ain’ a man in Poketown,” chimed in Aunt Janty, “whut wouldn’ shave hisse’f bald ef Melindy spressed a zire fuh he haiah. ‘Tain’ no reason Brothah Tyndal gwine tuh be diffunt.”

Aunt Martha smiled with conscious pride; it was no small matter to be grandmother to the belle of Poketown.

“Me an’ Melindy will do whut we kin, Brothah Wiggins,” she promised rashly.

The next evening the three pillars of Little Bethel met again in the parlor of

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Aunt Martha Young. This time they were reinforced by the presence of Melinda, who sat sulkily aloof and apparently took but little interest in the proceedings.

“Aun’ Ma’thy,” said Brother Wiggin pompously, “has yo’ done splained tuh Melindy whut she got tuh do?”

“I done make huh read out loud tuh me twict ovah ’bout Mistah Samson an’ he lady-frien’,” replied Aunt Martha delicately.

“Whut yo’ got tuh say fuh yo’se’f, Melindy?” asked Aunt Janty suddenly; but Melinda made no response.

“Min’ yo’ mannahs, gal,” admonished her grandmother severely.

Melinda turned her head slightly and addressed the masculine element.

“Does yo’ sho’ nuff b’lieve Brothah Tyndal am like Samson?” she inquired earnestly.

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“I does,” he returned with conviction.

“An’ kin he do whut Samson done?”
she continued.

“Ez long ez he haiah float out behin’
he haid,” replied Brother Wiggins sol-
emnly, “dey ain’ nawthin’ he kain’t do.”

The girl twisted her fingers irreso-
lutely and cast a rebellious glance at her
grandmother.

“Do yo’ own clippin’,” she muttered
sullenly. “Tain’ faiah tuh ax me tuh
do whut yo’s feahed tuh do yo’se’f.”

“Melindy,” said Aunt Martha warn-
ingly.

“Don’ keer,” said Melinda, bursting
into tears. “I ain’ gwine tuh be kilt wid
no jawbone, so now!”

“Whut yo’ means, Melindy?” queried
Aunt Janty.

“Ole Samson he done kill folks wid
de jawbone of a’ ass,” sobbed Melinda,
“an’ I reckon Brothah Tyndal done got

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he jawbone roun' handy. I ain' gwine tuh die yit; I's too young."

"Lemme zort wid huh," offered Brother Wiggins officiously, interrupting the angry retort of Aunt Martha and laying his hand on Melinda's shoulder as he spoke.

"Honey," he said quietly, "yo's wrong in yo' notions. Samson didn' kill nobody."

"Look in de Book," said the girl, unconvinced; "hit done say he kilt right an' lef wid de jawbone of a' ass."

"Laws, Melindy," returned Brother Wiggins soothingly, "I dunno whut yo's thinkin' 'bout. Samson didn' kill nobody; he slew he enemies, dat's all."

"Dat's all," echoed Aunt Janty reassuringly.

"Dey's a heap o' diffunce betwix' killin' an' slewin'," explained the preacher condescendingly; "hit am only wicked

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men whut kills, but hit am de righteous an' dem whut is sanctified whut knows how tuh slew."

Melinda was now listening intently.

"I dunno," she remarked reflectively, "ez it make any mattah tuh dem whut de jawbone hit whuthah dey wuh kilt or slewed."

Brother Wiggins resorted to another expedient.

"Melindy," he said, "does yo' know why yo' done been s'lected tuh do dis pious ack fuh yo' chu'ch?"

"'Caze yo's feahed tuh up an' do hit fuh yo'se'f," returned Melinda with recurring resentment in her tones.

"'Caze dey ain' no lady in Poketown ez kin 'swade like yo' kin," he replied, "an' if dat long-haiahed zorter up in Zion kin hol' out 'g'inst yo', Melindy, honey, den he am mo' en morshial man."

Melinda simpered consciously; the

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right string had at last been pulled, and Brother Wiggins, seizing his opportunity, extorted a promise from her to waylay his rival at the first opportunity.

“Yo’ mought begin by axin’ de straightes’ way tuh heav’n,” suggested Aunt Janty thoughtfully, “an’ say yo’ done feel yo’s stahted wrong, ’caze yo’s been trabellin’ in de way Brothah Wiggins p’inted out.”

“An’ yo’ kin keep yo’ scissors handy in yo’ pocket,” added that gentleman; “dey ain’ no tellin’ when yo’ chance gwine tuh come.”

The fears of Melinda returned with redoubled force at this practical suggestion.

“I’s skeert tuh tech de haiah o’ Brothah Tyndal,” she said nervously; “dey ain’ no tellin’ whut bones he done keep roun’ tuh slew wid, same ez Samson. Ef he go tuh grapplin’ down in he

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pocket I's gwine tuh up an' run away. I's skeert, dat's whut I is," finished the reluctant Delilah with a second burst of tears.

Brother Tyndal passed his hand caressingly over his sleek and shining locks and smiled encouragement at the suppliant beside him. It is undoubtedly easier to take some sinners by the hand and lead them forward in the straight and narrow way than to indicate it by merely standing aloof and pointing. There were times when Brother Tyndal found this duty not unpleasant, and this was one of them.

"Is yo' mo' easy-like in yo' min', li'l Sistah?" he inquired with a gentle pressure of her hand at the same time coming closer to her.

The little sister said that her mind was quite at rest, but that she needed

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just one thing to make her happiness complete.

“I feels, Brothah Tyndal,” she said earnestly, “dat ef I kep’ a lock of yo’ haiah in meh buzzom, ole Satan couldn’ git in nohow.”

Brother Tyndal merely responded vaguely that he would think about it. The scissors in Melinda’s pocket weighed heavily at times and she longed to cast them aside. Moreover, she had been warned that morning by her grandmother that dire consequences awaited her if her task were not performed within a week, and Aunt Martha was a woman of her word. Melinda sighed heavily; her lot in life appeared most undesirable. Then too the fascinations of Brother Tyndal had not been exerted in vain, and Melinda felt she could not deprive him of his strength without acute regret on her own part. Her

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thoughts also dwelt constantly upon the concealed and unusual weapon with which his enemies were presumably destroyed.

“Brothah Tyndal,” she said timidly, “does yo’ keep yo’ jawbone wid yo’ alwiz?”

“I couldn’ git ’long widout it nohow,” returned Brother Tyndal in evident astonishment.

They paused at Melinda’s front gate, and he refused her invitation to enter, saying he must go home and rest before the evening service.

“Is yo’ gwine tuh be dah, li’l Sistah?” he inquired, with an appealing glance.

“Is yo’ cyahin’ ‘bout sich ez me?” asked Melinda, returning the glance with interest. And Brother Tyndal convinced her that he cared very much.

Melinda reluctantly entered the house, her work unperformed and her heart re-

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bellious within her. Brother Wiggins and Aunt Martha greeted her with cold disapproval; they felt that Melinda must be spurred on towards her duty.

“How much longah,” demanded her grandmother, “is yo’ gwine tuh higgle ovah dat haiah bizness?”

“Dem ez puts dey han’ tuh de plough an’ looks back mus’ take de konse-kinses,” admonished Brother Wiggins severely.

Brother Wiggins felt bitterly on the subject, for the paucity of dimes and nickels in the offertory of Little Bethel had become appalling. Melinda, without responding, seated herself by the window and waited until it should be time to go to church. Evening service begins late in Poketown, to accommodate those who are obliged to wash the dishes of carnally minded Caucasians, therefore twilight deepened and the

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moon rose slowly over the tapering steeple of Little Bethel and the flat roof of Zion. Hurried footsteps approached the house, and Aunt Janty Gibbs burst breathlessly into the room.

“Now am de time,” she gasped; “he am gone tuh sleep in he back gyahdin; I done seen him f’om meh kitchen windah.”

“Come on, Melindy,” said Brother Wiggins, rising resolutely, “de houah am at han’. Come fohwahd, Chile o’ Little Bethel.”

The Child of Little Bethel hung back, protesting vainly against her fate.

“Dis hyah ain’ no time tuh stop fuh trifles,” said Aunt Janty emphatically; “take huh by de han’, Brothah Wiggins, an’ pull hahd; me an’ Aun’ Ma’thy’s gwine tuh push.”

In this manner they proceeded by a circuitous and unfrequented route to the

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back yard of Brother Tyndal. There, indeed, lay the Son of Thunder stretched upon a bench, sleeping soundly but audibly, with his wealth of hair gently stirred by the evening breeze. The sight of his flowing locks exasperated Brother Wiggins beyond endurance.

“Do yo’ juty,” he commanded, pushing the shrinking girl forward.

“I’s skeert,” quavered Melinda, drawing her scissors slowly from her pocket.

“Whut yo’s gwine tuh do,” said Brother Wiggins reassuringly, as he waved his hand towards his rival’s back yard, “am gwine tuh make yo’ fuhevah blessid.”

Thus encouraged, Melinda took several steps forward.

“O Lawd,” she ejaculated, pausing suddenly, “keep he han’ f’om offen de jawbone.”

“Dey ain’ nawthin’ gwine tuh keep

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my han' offen *yo'* jawbone ef yo' don' git tuh wuck," remarked Aunt Martha with unmistakable emphasis.

Melinda desperately thrust her scissors into the black hair before her. They were very sharp and cut clean and quickly, but years of growth had formed a felt-like covering on the head of Brother Tyndal which resisted the blades deliciously. Again and again she thrust the glittering shears, listening to them crunch their way through the soft, resisting mass with a thrill of pleasure. A demon of destruction seized the girl, and she slashed viciously in every direction across and around the head of Brother Tyndal. The victim stirred uneasily.

"Come away," whispered Brother Wiggins, pulling at her skirts, "come away. Yo's done noble, but he am gwine tuh wake up. Come away."

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With a parting clash of her shears Melinda obeyed, and the conspirators stole swiftly homeward.

Tyndal, Son of Thunder, yawned and sat upright. Such was the thickness and tenaciousness of his hair that in spite of the recent attack most of it still clung together upon his head, although ready to fall apart at the touch of a finger. He realized that he had been asleep and feared he was late for church, therefore he hurried off without the usual caress to his head. The route of Brother Tyndal was marked by stray locks of black hair, which fell here and there by the wayside unnoticed.

And he was very late. The congregation, taxing to the utmost the limited capacity of Zion, had been impatiently waiting for the best part of an hour. Brother Tyndal hurried, perspiring, into the pulpit.

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“We will jine in singin’ ‘Mary and Ma’thy’s jes’ gone along,’ ” he announced; wiping his glistening forehead. A thick lock of black hair remained in his fingers when he withdrew his hand from his brow. Brother Tyndal laid it on the pulpit before him and stared long and earnestly, then cautiously felt the crown of his head; a second ringlet lay upon the pulpit beside the first. A few youthful spirits giggled outright, and the preacher shook his head at them reprovingly; quite a shower of black locks fell upon the floor around him. Brother Tyndal sank upon his sofa, dazed and mortified; at last he struggled to his feet and strove to address his flock.

“Meh brothahs an’ meh sistahs,” he began, “I dunno whut have done happen tuh me. I tuck some needful res’ in meh back gyahdin in de quietude of de byhds an’ de flowahs——”

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“Reckon Brothah Tyndal been sleepin’ wid de byhds so frequent he done begin tuh moult,” called a voice from the rear bench on the left-hand side.

“ ’Peahs tuh me tuh zemble de tuckey buzzahd mo’ en de byhds of de gyah-din,” quickly responded an occupant of the corresponding bench on the right, and a ripple of irrepressible laughter stirred the congregation. Indeed, the pastor presented a sufficiently ludicrous spectacle to excuse this procedure, for here and there a long lock had escaped the vigilance of Melinda and stood boldly erect, or hung at right angles to the various almost bald spots scattered thickly over his cranium. No wonder the congregation laughed!

“Ain’ yo’ got no ’spec’ fuh de sahvent o’ de Lawd?” he shouted angrily, trying vainly to regain his receding supremacy.

“I proposes,” continued the voice of

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the tormenter, "dat we c'lects de haiah an' makes it intuh mat'resses; reckon hit mought go roun' de congregation."

Verily the strength of Samson had departed.

Brother Wiggins sat in the pulpit of Little Bethel the Sunday following the events just recounted, and viewed with satisfaction the return of his straying lambs to the fold.

"I rises to renounce," he remarked, when the benches were all full, "I rises to renounce dat de shanty ovah de bridge dat some folks called de Chu'ch o' Zion am done shet up fuh good an' all. De Swo'd o' Jedgmint have done fell heavy on de haid o' dat sumptious niggah whut zumed tuh call hisse'f de Son o' Thundah. Sich am de fate o' de sinful. I didn' say nawthin' when yo' done tuck yo'se'fs ovah tuh Zion, 'caze I knowed

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de Lawd gwine tuh stan' by me an' Little Bethel. An' He done so; y-a-a-s, He done so."

"Hallelujah, praise de Lawd!" shouted Aunt Janty Gibbs suddenly.

"He done cleave de haid o' de upstaht," continued the preacher, when he could make himself heard—"y-a-a-s, dat's whut He done. De Swo'd o' Vengince done come down f'om heav'n while he slep' an' pull de haiahs o' 'ception outen he haid. An' whut's mo, meh frien's, de Lawd up an' done dis pious ack 'thout no wo'ds f'om me; He done lay de upstaht low an' 'prise him of de wicked haiah dat he done kunjah wid. Sich am de konsekinses o' sinfulness; sich am de fate o' de biggaty! May de flamin' Swo'd keep on fallin' on dem whut zerts Little Bethel, may de han'—"

"A-a-amen," called Aunt Martha

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Young, unable to keep silence longer,
“glory! glory! hallelujah!”

And the foundation of Little Bethel
rocked with the fervent thanksgivings
of its returned flock.

In the shadow of the deserted Zion
stood Samson, shorn indeed of his
strength and bitter in his denunciations
of his shearer. Brother Tyndal had
been obliged to visit the barber, and the
result was not pleasing to him. By his
side was Melinda; she had cast her lot
with that of her discomfited swain and
had promised to comfort him by be-
coming Mrs. Tyndal and seeking other
fields than Poketown, but her guilty
secret became oppressive at times. She
still feared some harm might come to
her.

“I likes yo’ lots bettah ’thout all dat
haiah,” she remarked tentatively.

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“Jes’ lemme git hol’ o’ de pusson whut done it,” he said grimly, “dat’s all. Jes’ lemme git meh han’ on him.”

Melinda slipped her hand lovingly within his arm.

“Would yo’ slew him wid yo’ jaw-bone?” she inquired, her thoughts immediately recurring to that dreaded instrument of destruction. She had resolved to institute a thorough search for it and to conceal it forever when she should have free access to all the possessions of Brother Tyndal—after they were married.

“I reckon,” returned that gentleman thoughtfully, “dat dis yeah am a ’casion fuh razahs, er fuh fistesses, mo’ en fuh jaws.”

A loud burst of thanksgiving arose from brilliantly lighted Little Bethel, which was plainly visible from where they stood. Brother Tyndal turned

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towards Zion, dark and silent, the scene of his triumphs and also of his humiliation.

“Jes’ lemme git hol’ on him onct,” he muttered. “Jes’ lemme lay meh hand on him onct, O Lawd! Jes’ onct.”

Melinda laid her head affectionately upon his shoulder.

“Honey,” she said, “I’s gwine tuh he’p yo’ look fuh dat sinful pusson.”

“I only axes tuh tech him onct,” he repeated, his arm about her slender waist.

“Me an’ yo’,” she responded, “am gwine tuh look fuh him all de time. Jes’ wait twell *I* gits hol’ on him. I’s gwine tuh show him whut I thinks o’ sech ackshuns. I has meh own ‘pinions ‘bout ‘em. Yo’ ain’ gwine tuh fin’ him ‘thout me, honey; we’ll jes’ lay holt on de wicked pusson whenevah we ketches him.”



A LOUD BURST OF THANKSGIVING AROSE FROM
LITTLE BETHEL.



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“Dat’s so,” responded unsuspicious Brother Tyndal, “yo’s pow’ful peah, Melindy. I reckons maybe yo’ kin be of some ’sistance tuh me, ef yo’ *is* a lady.”

And Melinda smiled quietly as she changed the subject.

IV

THE ASS THAT VANQUISHED BALAAM

“How yo’ say de kerrege kep’ a-movin’?” inquired Mrs. Finney.

“Dey wa’n’t nawthin’ a-pullin’,” returned her husband, “an’ dey wa’n’t nawthin’ a-pushin’, yit sho’s yo’ bawn, Ma’y Jane, dat kerrege come down de road todes me lickety-split, wid smoke a-bustin’ outen de back.”

“Sho’ now!” she exclaimed incredulously.

“Hit stop befo’ de pos’-offis,” he continued, “an’ I sez tuh de man settin’ up in it, ‘Mistah,’ I sez, ‘huccum dat kerrege tuh run ’thout no annymile tuh pull it?’ sez I. He up an’ sez tuh me, he sez, kinder shoht-like, ‘Kerrysene,’ sez he.

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Dem wuh his wo'ds, Ma'y Jane; 'Kerry-sene,' he sez."

"Laws!"

"An' so," resumed Mr. Finney argumentatively, "ef his buggy kin run wid kerrysene, my buggy kin run dat a-way too."

"Whuh yo' gwine tuh git de ile?" demanded Mary Jane practically. "I reckon it take a pow'ful lot tuh wuck a buggy."

"Hit do," he agreed sadly, "hit sut-tinly do."

"Of co'se," she suggested, after a moment's silence, "yo mought trade off 'Liza."

"I mought," returned Mr. Finney imperturbably, "an' yit, ag'in, I moughtn'."

Out in the back yard Eliza herself, a small brown mule of dejected mien, stood quietly in a corner with one hip

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drooping mournfully. A close observer might have detected a certain peculiarity about her anatomy in connection with her hind legs, which seemed to be hinged on to her body rather than adjusted in the usual manner. Eliza stretched her neck and yawned exhaustively, displaying an alarming amount of red gum.

“Gwine tuh rain, sho’s yo’ bawn,” remarked Mr. Finney, looking at her admiringly; “she kin tell ev’ry time, ‘Liza kin.’”

“Ef dat’s so,” announced his help-meet, as she put away her ironing-board, “yo got tuh hitch up dat meule an’ tote dese clo’es home ‘mejately; de sun am done set now, an’ yo’ ain’ gwine tuh git no suppah twell de clo’es goes home. Does yo’ hyah me talkin’?”

Mr. Finney reluctantly arose from the doorstep and prepared to perform his

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weekly task of taking home the laundry of various neighboring families. He pushed out his old buggy, produced a set of harness much mended with rope, and approached his steed. Eliza rolled her eyes until only the whites were visible and waited patiently. Her master regarded her with unwonted interest as he drew near. He was disposed to be friendly.

“Ain’ gwine tuh trade yo’ off fuh no kerrysene,” he muttered, laying his hand affectionately upon her flank.

There was a sudden twinkling of small heels as Eliza’s hind quarters flew up and out as though moved by a powerful mechanism. Mr. Finney sat upon the ground at the opposite side of the yard with a dazed expression. Crawling to the fence, he leaned against it to regain his breath, rubbing his head ruefully meanwhile and looking askance at Eliza,

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who had resumed her former pensive attitude.

“Knocked de breff clean outen him dat time,” ejaculated Mrs. Finney from the kitchen window.

It was evident nothing very unusual had occurred from the ordinary routine of harnessing the mule.

“How yo’ gwine tuh make de buggy trabbel, s’pos’n’ yo’ gits de ile?” inquired Mary Jane thoughtfully as her husband rose and stood uncertainly upon his feet.

“I takes de shaf’s offen de front o’ de buggy,” he explained pompously, “an’ splices a han’le tuh de axle so’s tuh steeah wid. Den I puts de kerry-sene intuh a kittle an’ sets a match tuh it. Dat’s all.”

“S’pos’n’ it take an’ splo’?” suggested Mrs. Finney nervously.

“Laws!” he returned impatiently,

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“ain’ de kittle got a spout fuh de steam tuh come thu’? Whut yo’ s’pose a spout am fuh? Tell me dat. Hit’s de span-sion whut bus’es b’ilahs an’ sich—not de stuff whut span’. Yo’ sho’ly am a ‘no’-nothin’, Ma’y Jane; I’s ’shamed of yo’, dat’s whut I is—’shamed.”

“I don’ see nohow whut gwine tuh tote de buggy,” retorted Mrs. Finney, unabashed.

“De ile,” said her husband patronizingly, “gits tuh b’ilin’, an’ de kittle am jammed in tight undah de seat. She puff an’ she blow; she puff an’ she blow, same ez de steam cyahs, an’ ev’ry time she puff an’ blow de buggy-wheels goes roun’.”

With some ingenuity on the part of her owner Eliza was induced to take her place between the shafts, the hamper of clean clothes was hoisted into place, and all was ready for the start.

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“Ma'y Jane,” commanded Mr. Finney, “fotch de kittle.”

“Whut yo’ talkin’ ‘bout?” returned Mrs. Finney derisively.

“Fotch de kittle,” he continued; “I’s gwine tuh come home ’thout no lazy, no-’count meule. I’s gwine tuh git de kerrysene somehow an’ come traipsin’ down de road, settin’ back takin’ meh ease, same ez de kerrege I done tole yo’ ‘bout. Fotch de kittle.”

“Honey,” said Mrs. Finney, unwillingly producing her new teakettle, “is yo’ sho’ de wo’d he done say wuh *kerrysene?*”

“Woman,” he returned majestically, “don’ yo’ ahgify wid me. I’s a man, I is, an’ I knows whut I knows. Fotch de kittle.”

“Good-by, kittle,” ejaculated Mrs. Finney mournfully as she watched the exodus of the buggy.

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“Yo’ suttinly am de mos’ zumptious, low-down, triflin’ annymile de good Lawd evah made,” remarked Mr. Finney to his steed as they journeyed leisurely along, “an’ I’s gwine tuh swop yo’ off, dat’s whut I’s gwine tuh do.”

Eliza groaned heavily in response. It was her custom to grunt or moan at every revolution of the wheels. At the foot of the hill she stopped abruptly. It was evident she had an idea.

“Gwan,” said Mr. Finney encouragingly.

The wisp of a tail was pressed close to her body as the mule moved her hind quarters suggestively. Her driver descended hastily.

“Ef yo’s gwine tuh hump yo’se’f,” he said, “I suttinly ain’ got no call tuh set back o’ yo’.”

Eliza stood at the base of the hill apparently quite satisfied with her sur-

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roundings, while her discomfited owner revolved about her on the roadside.

“Sticks ain’ no good, ‘caze o’ de tux-tah of huh hide,” he said finally, “an’ duht in huh mouf ain’ no good, nuthah, ‘caze she up an swallahs it like it wuh oats. I’s got tuh lead huh, dat’s whut I’s got tuh do. Come on hyah.”

The last remark was accompanied by a vicious tug at the bridle. Eliza willingly complied; she was an excellent illustration of the type of humanity which can be led but not driven.

The Reverend Kinnard Brice sat upon the roadside and gazed at his feet. They were large and substantial, but very tired and quite incapable of adding another mile to the many they had already travelled that day, yet tramp they must to reach their destination. He looked furtively about; apparently



THE REV. KINNARD BRICE GAZED AT HIS FEET.



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he was alone. From his trousers-pocket he drew a flat black bottle, which he applied to his lips; his air as he replaced the cork was somewhat more genial.

“I done preach down tuh de Buck las’ night fuh de mattah o’ ten cents,” he soliloquized, “an’ I done preach ovah in Noo Jahsey all summah fuh de mattah o’ seventy-five cents. Reckon dey’s some folks gits dey ‘ligion pow’ful cheap.”

Shaking his head mournfully over the degeneracy of mankind, he pensively removed the cork again, but hastily replaced it as the rattle of an approaching vehicle became audible.

A small procession was indeed near at hand. First appeared Mr. Finney, short in stature and deprecating in manner; even the tuft of gray whiskers on the edge of his chin seemed to wag apologetically as he labored along; after Mr.

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Finney followed Eliza, weary in aspect and meek in demeanor; the mere effort of performing to the best of her ability the work expected of her had apparently exhausted her entire vitality; after Eliza came the buggy, guiltless of paint and minus a top; the fact that all the spokes in the wheels curved decidedly outward and that most of the boards in the floor were loose perhaps assisted in producing the peculiar rattling sound which heralded their approach.

“Howdy, Brothah Brice, howdy?” said Mr. Finney, calling a halt in the line of march.

“Howdy, Brothah Finney?” returned the other. “How do yo’ co’porosity segashiate dis evenin’?”

“Tol’able,” returned Mr. Finney guardedly, “jes’ tol’able, thanky.”

It was not etiquette in Poketown to acknowledge robust health. Mr. Brice

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looked sympathetically at his feet and enviously at the unoccupied vehicle.

“Whuh yo’ gwine?” he inquired incidentally as Mr. Finney seated himself on the roadside.

“I’s gwine tuh de sto’ tuh trade off dat no-’count annymile fuh kerrysene tuh run meh buggy wid,” he announced pompously. “Meules am ole style now; kerrysene am all de go. I’s gwine——”

The neck of the black bottle protruding from the pocket of Mr. Brice caught the eye of his companion and checked his flow of eloquence. His countenance suddenly became distorted as with pain, and he rocked himself to and fro in apparent anguish.

“De mis’ry,” he gasped; “hit done ketch me twell it take meh breff. De mis’ry in meh back. Oh, fuh a sip o’ brandy tuh tech de spot!”

Mr. Brice slowly produced his bottle.

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“A little apple-jack,” he explained, “dat I wuh gwine tuh tote tuh po’ ole Aun’ Judy. Put it tuh yo’ lips, Brothah Finney.”

Brother Finney complied, and Brother Brice also sipped absently before replacing the cork.

Now the store which Mr. Finney had announced as his destination was diametrically opposite to the direction Mr. Brice desired to pursue. He considered the situation thoughtfully, while the red rim of the moon appeared over the edge of the adjacent woods, and Eliza drooped her hip and waited patiently.

“Brothah Finney,” he said at last, tendering the bottle, “whut dat yo’ done say ‘bout kerrysene?”

Mr. Finney repeated his intention of transforming his buggy into an automobile by means of kerosene oil.

“An’ is yo’ gwine tuh swop away a

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faithful frien' fuh a mess o' ile?" inquired Mr. Brice reproachfully.

"A no-'count, low-down, wuthless annymile," said Mr. Finney sternly, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Take keer whut yo' sez, O Man o' Sin!" proclaimed Brother Brice as from the pulpit. "Does yo' know yo' am speechifyin' 'bout a sacred annymile, b'loved by de Lawd? 'Membah Balaam; 'membah de angil whut done stan' in de path; 'membah de ass whut up an' spoke out in meetin' 'caze Balaam tuck an' beat huh. 'Membah all dat, Brothah Finney, an' go slow 'bout yo' tradin'—go slow."

"Asses am asses," argued Mr. Finney; "dey ain' nawthin' in de Good Book 'bout a' ornery tow-path meule; reckon dey ain' 'quainted wid no angils nohow."

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“Meules am asses,” returned Brother Brice, again quenching his thirst; “I’s done been sanctified, I has, an’ I knows whut’s sacred an’ whut’s not. De meule am done been s’lected,—he’s done been s’lected,—same ez Balaam,—done s’lected——”

The voice of Brother Brice grew thicker and trailed off uncertainly.

The apple-jack was strong as well as sweet. Mr. Finney felt genial and pleasant; the world presented no cares; Mary Jane at home and the basket of undelivered clothes were alike forgotten. Mr. Brice, on the contrary, became restless and argumentative; he felt that he was due somewhere, but where he knew not. To convince all men of the inspired condition of Eliza seemed to be his chief object in life. They sat upon the roadside exchanging the bottle until its contents were exhausted, when they

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continued politely passing it back and forth.

“Le’s go set in de buggy,” suggested Mr. Brice finally.

“Jes’ ez yo’ ‘zires,” returned Mr. Finney, smiling vacantly, “jes’ ez yo’ ‘zires, Brothah.”

“Yo’ an’ Balaam,” said Mr. Brice as his companion hoisted himself slowly into the buggy, “done been chose by de Lawd tuh keep comp’ny wid a sacred ass. I know it by de signs o’ de zodiac.”

“De zodiac,” repeated Mr. Finney, still smiling, “de zodiac.”

“An yit,” continued the preacher, rising and walking unsteadily forward, “you don’ ‘preciate yo’ blessin’s no mo’ en ole Balaam ‘preciated his’n. Yo’ talk ‘bout dem mobbles!”

“Mobbles?” repeated Mr. Finney, with his pleasant smile; “whut mobbles?”

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“Otty mobbles,” rejoined Brother Brice with a visible effort. “I done seen ‘em in Noo Jahsey. What’s a mobble made by de han’ o’ man tuh a meule made by de han’ o’ Gawd? Mobbles splo’s an’ bus’es. Do a meule evah bus’? Tell me dat, Brothah Finney?”

“Splo’s an’ bus’es,” repeated Mr. Finney pleasantly.

“Yo’s drunk, yo’ Chile o’ Wickedness,” proclaimed Brother Brice, lurching heavily forward; “yo’s done tuck too much apple-jack. In de presence o’ dis sacred annymile yo’s drunk. Hide yo’ face, Brothah Finney, hide yo’ face ez I hides mine, tuh shet out dis ‘graceful sight.’”

He leaned upon the shafts and rested his head upon the drooping flank of the mule. Eliza flattened her ears and lowered her head; there was a sudden, swift movement, and Brother Brice lay upon

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a bed of Spanish needles at the other side of the road.

“Mobbles made by de han’ o’ man,” repeated Mr. Finney from the buggy, “an’ meules made by de han’ o’ Gawd.”

“Hit ain’ fuh mor-sh-i-al man,” said Brother Brice, as he slowly resumed an upright position, “tuh tech dem whut am s’lected tuh be sacred.”

He clambered into the buggy and took up the reins.

“Hyah we sets,” he announced thickly, “twell de sperrit move huh tuh precede. ‘Tain’t fuh us tuh hurry huh.”

“Hyah we sets,” agreed Mr. Finney, wagging his beard cheerfully.

At this point the spirit moved Eliza and she started suddenly, the unexpectedness of her act causing the two men to lurch backward dangerously. Mr. Finney caught at the seat of the buggy to regain his balance, but Mr. Brice

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clung desperately to one rein. Eliza, obeying the intimation of the rein, turned swiftly from the main road and plunged down a lane leading into the woods. Apparently it was but little used, for overhanging branches of trees threatened to decapitate the intruders, while deep ruts cruelly wrenched the wheels of the feeble vehicle.

“Whoa!” shouted Mr. Finney as Eliza sped into the darkness with alarming speed.

“Seek not tuh ahgify wid huh,” advised Mr. Brice, holding on as best he could while the clothesbasket bobbed wildly about behind them, “hit may be she hyah a Voice a-callin’ tuh huh.”

The branch of a sumac lifted several small articles from the top of the basket; succeeding branches did likewise. Mr. Finney reached for the reins and jerked them violently, but Eliza galloped

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on unheeding. A portion of a wild grapevine snatched a white garment which slowly unfolded as the buggy rattled on; it proved to be a nightgown caught by the neck, which as it swung to and fro presented a ghostly aspect.

On they dashed, swerving first one way and then another, their route marked by various articles of feminine apparel, which looked pathetically lonesome in their uncongenial surroundings. Now this lane was merely a loop of road extending in a circle through the woods, whose only exit was the gate by which they had entered. Consequently it was possible to continue driving indefinitely about the circle, and Eliza with every leap drew nearer the completion of the first round.

It was very dark; the rays of the moon, penetrating fitfully here and there through the thick tangle of leaves, cast

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pale and flickering lights in unexpected places. Overhead an occasional owl hooted, or the whirr of wings disclosed a frightened bird rising from its nest as the rattling vehicle passed swiftly by.

“ ‘Lijah, he done went tuh heav’n in a cha’iot o’ fiah,’ ” hazarded Mr. Brice as they bumped rapidly onward. “ Say yo’ prayahs, Brothah Finney, say yo’ prayahs; we’s gwine tuh be drawed offen de yearth by dis meule. Huh laigs am changin’ intuh wings, an’ well I knows it. Say yo’ prayahs, Brother Finney, we’s gwine tuh mount uppahds, sho’s yo’ bawn.”

But Mr. Finney, sawing desperately at the mouth of his steed, had no time for prayer. Instead, he suddenly slackened his hold on the reins, and leaning out over the dashboard lashed the galloping animal with them.

“ Gwan,” he shouted, “ gwan, I tells

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yo'. Who wants yo' tuh stop, anyhow?
Keep a-goin'—keep a-goin'."

And Eliza sped on.

"Whut yo' doin'?" demanded Brother Brice, clinging to the seat as the buggy careened alarmingly; "yo' done tuck and struck huh, same ez Balaam. Yo' done 'fend de Lawd, same ez Balaam. Say yo' prayahs, Brothah Finney, say yo' prayahs."

"Dey ain' no othah way tuh stop huh," panted Mr. Finney. "Gwan, yo' Chile o' Satan—gwan."

He repeated his application of the ends of the reins as he spoke.

"De Lawd fuhgive yo' dat ack," ejaculated Mr. Brice piously.

Now the loop of the road had been once accomplished and they were some distance on the second round. As Eliza threw up both head and heels in response to her master's appeal, the nightgown

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suspended from the wild grapevine fluttered directly across her path and she stopped suddenly and entirely. The abruptness of her act precipitated both passengers upon the roadside, where they lay face downward, unharmed but terrified. Eliza brayed loud and long.

“She gwine tuh speak out in meetin’,” quavered Brother Brice; “de angil wid de swo’d am done com tuh light. Say yo’ prayahs, Brothah Finney, say yo’ prayahs; she gwine tuh speak.”

“Whut she gwine tuh say?” whispered Mr. Finney, his tones somewhat muffled from his recumbent position.

“De ass done say tuh Balaam,” returned Mr. Brice, “ ‘Whuff or yo’ done hit me?’ Dat whut it say, an’ dat whut she gwine tuh say, sho’s yo’ bawn. De angil am gwine tuh smote yo’ wid de flamin’ swo’d ’cause ‘Liza she done got a grudge ag’in’ yo’ ’cause o’ dem mobbles.

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Say yo' prayahs, Brothah Finney, say yo' prayahs."

Silence ensued for some minutes, then Eliza lifted up her voice and spoke again. Mr. Finney shivered, expecting some dreadful calamity.

"Twict," whispered Mr. Brice apprehensively; "ef she take an' call three times, de angil am boun' tuh come."

"Lawd," entreated Mr. Finney earnestly, "look down on me an' shet huh mouf."

But Eliza opened her mouth and brayed the third time.

"Hit am comin'," groaned Brother Brice, as the evening breeze stirred the treetops; "I done hyah de rus'le o' de wings."

"I feels de Presence," gasped Mr. Finney.

"Hol' on tuh de gyahmints o' de sanctified," suggested Brother Brice, tender-

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ing a dingy coattail, "hol' on tight, O
Man o' Sin!"

Mr. Finney clutched it gratefully.

"Brothah Brice," he inquired weakly,
"whut does yo' see?"

"Lif yo' haid," commanded Brother
Brice, "when I counts three; lif' yo'
haid an' peek, same ez I's gwine tuh do."

Through a rift in the treetops the rays
of the moon fell directly upon the white
garment suspended from the grapevine.
The evening breeze lifted the large collar
with its misty frill of lace, until it seemed
to form a halo about an invisible head;
one sleeve swayed gently to and fro, and
finally rested protectingly upon the at-
tenuated neck of Eliza, while the other
hung limply down.

"One," quavered Mr. Brice, "two,
three!"

Both heads were elevated simulta-
neously and remained raised, transfixed

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with terror. Through the woods the wind sighed mournfully. It stirred the leaves until they rustled complainingly; it filled out the empty curves of the nightgown until they seemed to assume mammoth proportions; it lifted the pendent sleeve until it was extended at right angles, pointing directly at the unhappy Finney.

“Pray,” he gasped, clinging desperately to the garment of the sanctified, “pray fuh me.”

“Lawd,” murmured Brother Brice, moistening his ashen lips, “Lawd, dese eyes has saw—dese eyes has saw——”

But Eliza, interrupting the flow of eloquence, again lifted her voice in protest, and the white arm was raised high in the air, as though to strike. With a loud cry of terror both men fell again upon their faces.

“Do yo’ own prayin’,” exclaimed the

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sanctified, twitching his coat from the grasp of his erring brother, "make yo' peace, Brothah Finney, make yo' peace! I ain' gwine tuh be sterminated 'caze o' yo' sins. I done tole yo' de meule wuh sacred. Do yo' own prayin'!"

"Lawd," gasped Mr. Finney, his beard wagging tremulously, "yo' knows dat I luvs Thou."

"Splain 'bout de mobble," prompted Mr. Brice, "splain tuh de angil."

"I takes back meh wo'ds 'bout de mobble," continued Mr. Finney pleadingly. "Is yo' gwine tuh smote me wid yo' swo'd 'caze o' wo'ds I nevah meant nohow? Why don' yo' drop yo' ahm easy-like? Ef yo's boun' tuh split a haid befo' yo' gits back tuh glory, hyah's Brothah Brice mighty handy; his haid am pow'ful sof', 'twon't be no trouble tuh split it nohow."

"Lawd," interrupted Brother Brice,

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crooking his elbow to protect his skull, "dem am de wo'ds of a wicked an' 'ceitful man. Don' yo' pay no 'tention tuh 'em nohow."

Silence ensued for some minutes.

"Is yo' still dah wid yo' 'vengeful swo'd?" queried Mr. Finney feebly, mustering courage to look up. The figure was indeed still present.

"'Liza," he continued, appealing pathetically to the mule, "'Liza, yo' an' me has done kep' comp'ny dis many a yeah; I done treat yo' good, 'co'din' tuh meh lights. When yo' wuh pow'ful ornery I didn' know hit wuh jes' de sacredness a-bustin' out. I done tuck cyah o' yo' dis long time; is yo' gwine tuh 'zert me now? Speak a good wo'd fuh me tuh de angil, 'Liza; I didn' mean nawthin' 'bout dem mobbles."

Crawling dejectedly along the ground, he ventured to touch the hoof of the

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mule in timid supplication. Now the patience of Eliza had been sorely tried that night, and the fumbling of a hand about her hind leg proved the last straw. With a vicious squeal she dropped her head between her knees and began to kick, rapidly and effectively. It was short work to release herself from the buggy, which collapsed at once, a melancholy wreck; the shafts, however, were still attached to the mule as she started homeward, and one of them jerked the nightgown from the grapevine and dragged it along. Eliza sped on, the white garment fluttering out from her shoulder, and the two men sat and watched her in awestruck silence. It was some time before either spoke.

“Behol’ de w’ite wings h’istin’ huh tuh heav’n,” said Brother Brice at last. “A meule no longah, ’Liza am riz tuh be a saint in glory. Fall on yo’ knees

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an' wo'ship de place huh feet done res' on."

With a last flap of her newly acquired wings Eliza vanished, while the two men humbly knelt beside her footprints.

Mrs. Finney sat upon the doorstep and waited for the return of her husband. She waited a long time. The summer twilight deepened and the moon rose high in the heavens and still she waited. She finally became somewhat apprehensive.

"Reckon dat kerrysene mus' of tuck an' splo'," she said uneasily. "Wisht I'd done hel' on tuh meh kittle, anyhow."

The clatter of approaching hoofs became audible, and Eliza trotted swiftly into the yard. Mrs. Finney rose and followed her. A torn and dingy garment still clung to the broken shaft.

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Mrs. Finney detached it and examined it with interest.

“Sakes alive,” she exclaimed, “ef ‘tain’t Miss Lizzie’s bes’ ni’gown!”

She thoughtfully resumed her seat upon the doorstep and waited once more. Two melancholy figures drew slowly near, somewhat apologetic in manner.

“Dat yo’, Ma’y Jane?” said one, with the visible intention of making conversation.

“Huccum yo’ traipsin’ on yo’ feet ‘stid o’ settin’ up in de buggy takin’ yo’ ease, and comin’ down de road lickety-split?” she inquired unkindly.

“Mis’ Finney,” said Brother Brice solemnly, “a merrycle has done been ‘complished. De annymile yo’ calls ‘Liza have done sprouted huh wings an’ riz tuh heav’n.”

“Humph!” ejaculated the lady.
“Whuh meh kittle?”

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“Ma'y Jane,” said her husband humbly, “I dunno. I tells yo' de truf, Ma'y Jane; I dunno whuh yo' kittle am.”

“Whuh de clean clo'es?” she next demanded.

“Mis' Finney,” said Brother Brice, with hand extended in lofty reproof, “men ez has saw merrycles sech ez we have saw dis night ain' got no time tuh 'membah clean clo'es.”

“Whut yo' say done happen tuh 'Liza?” was her next question.

“'Liza,” said the preacher, “done spread huh w'ite wings an' mount up-pahds. 'Liza am now settin' 'mongst de cherrybim an' de serryphim nigh de throne, soundin' praises night an' day.”

At this point Eliza in the back yard expressed a desire for supper; the two men started uneasily, and Mrs. Finney rose quietly.

“Come wid me,” she commanded,

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taking an arm of each and escorting them into the yard.

“Yo’ stop yo’ pack o’ lies,” she said with righteous indignation, pointing to the mule, “ ‘Liza done run home long befo’ yo’ did. Yo’s drunk, anyhow.”

“Ma’y Jane,” remonstrated her husband, “yo’s speechifyin’ tuh yo’ pastah.”

“Well,” she said angrily, “I kain’ help havin’ a nose, kin I? Ain’ I standin’ ’twixt yo’? Whut’s a nose fuh ’cept tuh smell wid? Yo’s both drunk; well I knows de signs o’ de times.”

She seized Mr. Finney by the collar and dragged him to a pump, conveniently near at hand, and resolutely bent his head beneath the spout.

“Pump!” she commanded her pastor.

“Sistah Finney,” he expostulated with dignity, “I——”

“Aftah I gits he haid clah,” she said

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firmly, "we's all gwine down de road tuh c'lect dem clo'es. Gwine—tuh—git—mo'—w'ite—wings—fo'—'Liza. Git tuh pumpin'."

She emphasized her remarks concerning the wings by vigorous jerks at the head of her unhappy husband.

"Brothah Brice," gasped the luckless Finney, "pump quick befo' meh neck gits broke. Don' ahgify wid huh no' mo' 'en yo' ahgified wid 'Liza. Reckon me an' Balaam don' take much stock in asses nohow. Fo' de Lawd's sake—pump!"

"Git tuh wuck," reiterated Mrs. Finney, one hand fastened in the beard of her lord and master and the other firmly clinched in the thatch of wool on top of his head, thus safely holding him in position, "whut's Balaam tuh me? Reckon he mus' ov kep' de s'loon yo' all done been tuh dis night. Git tuh wuck. Dem

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clo'es has got tuh be c'lected an' de
meule am got tuh be fed. We ain' got
no buggy now tuh run wid kerrysene or
meules neithah, 'caze o' dis ornery,
drunken niggah hyah. I's gwine tuh
l'ahn him not tuh be zumptious wid me
no mo'! Git tuh wuck pumpin'." The
grasp of her hands tightened.

"Pump, Brothah, pump," gurgled
Mr. Finney.

And Brother Brice pumped.

V

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“AND so,” concluded Miss Hattie solemnly, “the Lord struck Ananias dead for telling a lie.”

“Whut de Lawd done strike wid?” inquired a voice from the extreme end of the row of pickaninnies seated decorously before her, whose countenances varied in color from a pale tan to the ebony hue of the genuine negro.

Miss Hattie hastily searched her memory for a more explicit description of the exit of Ananias, and found herself obliged to improvise somewhat in order to meet the exigencies of the occasion.

“A thunderbolt came down from heaven, Abraham Augustus,” she replied, much encouraged by a gleam of

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interest on the part of a member of her flock, "and it killed Ananias and Sapphira too, just as I told you."

"Laws!" chorussed the class in unison.

"And what the Lord has done once, He can do again," continued Miss Hattie, following up the impression she had made; "and so, children, you must be very careful to always speak the truth. Remember what happens to liars. Now, you won't forget, will you?"

Abraham Augustus had been pondering deeply.

"Whut kin' ob a bolt am a thundah-bolt?" he demanded abruptly.

"A thunderbolt," said Miss Hattie, floundering in rather deep waters,— "well, a thunderbolt is a thunderbolt, you know. It is a terrible thing sent from heaven to kill people that don't tell the truth. Now, do you understand?"

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“Yaas’m,” responded the class dutifully, as they would have acquiesced in any statement.

“What is the Golden Text?” inquired Miss Hattie, changing the subject with skill.

Dead silence prevailed, while one or two members yawned exhaustively.

“Surely some of you must know it,” exclaimed the discouraged instructress; “I went over it with you so carefully not half an hour ago! Amanda Araminta Carter, see how much of it you can say.”

Amanda Araminta rose and stalked to the front, swinging her limp calico skirts coquettishly and twining her attenuated legs about each other with embarrassment.

“Yaas’m, Miss Hattie, I knows it,” she said with conscious pride.

“I thought you wouldn’t forget,” said

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Miss Hattie approvingly. "Now, what is it?"

Amanda Araminta hung her head shyly on one side and placed her finger in the corner of her mouth.

"Blessed am de meesh, fuh dey shell hyah it," she murmured, presumably alluding to the inheritance of the meek.

"We will sing 'Onward, Christian Soldiers,'" announced Miss Hattie hurriedly.

The Sunday-school dispersed and wended its several ways homeward in groups of two and three, gossiping and quarrelling after the manner of such gatherings the world over.

The routes of Amanda Araminta Carter and Abraham Augustus Bristow lay parallel, their homes being situated side by side in that settlement of African habitation known as Poketown, so they pursued their way on opposite sides of

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the road. Abraham Augustus threw bits of stick and handfuls of loose dirt at his vis-a-vis at short intervals; this was a delicate little attention on his part, designed to convey to her his interest. He cherished a deep though unexpressed admiration for Amanda Araminta, but not for worlds would he have walked along the public highway beside her. Nor was it etiquette for her to seem to be aware of his proximity when anyone else was within sight, so she marched on unmoved by even the most determined fusillade of earth and pebbles. Perhaps this was one way of showing his affection.

Reaching their respective homes simultaneously, the children paused before entering. On the doorstep of Abraham Augustus sat a small basket partly full of apples, while in and about the house silence reigned supreme.

“Mighty airy fuh aipples,” remarked

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Amanda Araminta casually, happening accidentally to perceive her neighbor.

“Oh, I dunno,” he responded loftily; “I’s done et many a’ aipple befo’ dis time o’ yeah.”

“Specs dey tas’e bettah en dey looks,” continued the lady suggestively.

“Yo’ ain’ gwine tuh tas’e ’em nohow, ya-a-a-h!” politely replied the gentleman.

Amanda Araminta settled herself on the doorstep, and a peculiar expression crossed her shrewd little face.

“Bet yo’ dat yo’ kain’ eat mo’ ’en two of dem aipples tuh wunct,” she volunteered presently.

“Laws!” he returned derisively, “I kin eat de hull baskit ef I wants tuh—eat ’em right now.”

“Yo’ ack like yo’ skeert tuh tech ’em,” she said indifferently.

“Who skeert? Me?” he scoffed boast-

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fully. "I ain' feahed ob nobody er nothin', I ain'."

The apples were small and knotty, of an emerald hue, and had been collected from beneath the trees of an adjacent orchard by Mrs. Bristow with reference to a pie. Amanda Araminta fingered them one by one, and selecting the largest and ripest, held it out temptingly.

"Dis yere aipple gittin' mighty mel-lah," said Eve No. 2.

The man who hesitates is lost. Abraham Augustus put out his hand for the fruit, withdrew it hastily, and extended it again.

"Does yo' want a bite?" he inquired patronizingly, when half-way through.

"Oh, I ain' puhtickellah," she replied, hoping to be urged. She was not again invited to partake, and the neglect rankled.

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“I’s gwine tuh eat ‘em all,” he announced, and proceeded to do so.

“Pig!” ejaculated Amanda Araminta as the last green knot disappeared and the door of the Bristow domicile opened from within.

“Whuh dem aipples?” demanded Mrs. Bristow, picking up the empty basket.

“Whut aipples?” asked her son, temporizing weakly.

“Whut yo’ done wid dem aipples, yo’ triflin’ niggah?” pursued Mrs. Bristow relentlessly.

Again did Abraham Augustus hesitate.

“I ain’ saw no aipples, mammy,” he said piously; “we jes’ done got home f’om Sunday-school, an’ de baskit wuh a-settin’ on de do’step same ez it am now. Ain’ dat so, Mandy?”

It was gall and wormwood to Abraham Augustus to be thus obliged to

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tacitly ask the assistance of Amanda Araminta to extricate him from his present predicament, and she knew it.

“Yaas’m, Mis’ Bristow,” she said officiously, “we jes’ done got back f’om Sunday-school.”

“Whuh dem aipples?” repeated Mrs. Bristow, fixing an eagle eye upon her offspring.

“Cross meh haht I nevah teched ’em,” said Abraham Augustus, suiting the action to the word; “de basket wuh a-settin’ jes’ dat a-way when we got hyah. I nevah teched it nohow. Hope tuh die.”

“Pow’ful quare,” said his mother, still unconvinced; but her son had vanished around the corner of the house, so she took the empty basket and returned to the kitchen, where she busied herself getting bottles of various sizes down from the shelf.

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“When dem aipples gits tuh wuck on his innahds I reckon dis yere’ll be mighty handy,” she remarked as she shook the one labelled paregoric vigorously and replaced it within easy reach.

Meanwhile Abraham Augustus had started down the Dutch Neck Road for the creek, which had occurred to him as a harbor of refuge, being somewhat inaccessible except by the short cut across the marsh which he proposed taking. As he crept past the rear of the house he became aware of a head raised over the back fence.

“Tole a lie,” taunted Amanda Araminta derisively, “tole a lie! Anny Nias! Gwine tuh be struck daid! Anny Nias!”

Abraham Augustus sped on, but the words rang unpleasantly in his ears. He wished that he might live the last hour over again; the result should be very

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different. He paused uncertainly in the midst of the marsh and sat down upon a tussock of dry grass.

The afternoon waned, and still he sat and pondered; for some reason he felt strangely depressed and averse to motion. Dark clouds gathered overhead unnoticed by Abraham Augustus, who was now much disturbed inwardly, physically as well as mentally.

“De Lawd done keep thundahbolts in his wescut pocket tuh kill folks whut tells lies,” he reflected uneasily.

A sullen rumble of thunder caused the unhappy boy to look apprehensively about him.

“Hit wuh a thundahbolt whut lay Anny Nias low,” he muttered miserably. “Miss Hattie done say dat whut happen tuh liahs.”

Overhead the clouds gathered black and lowering, parted now and then by

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vivid flashes of lightning, and the thunder grew louder and more frequent. Alone in the marsh with his accusing conscience and that other disturbed portion of his anatomy, Abraham Augustus cowered abjectly on his tussock and awaited his doom. Suddenly he fell upon his knees and raised his hands in supplication.

“Mistah Gawd,” he faltered, “I’s a-waitin’ fuh’ yo’. I’s hyah in de ma’sh spectin’ yo’. Yo’ ain’ gwine tuh s’prise me like yo’ done Miss Anny Nias. I’s skeert ob yo’, Mistah Gawd, but I’s spectin’ yo’.

“I’s mighty li’l an’ nigh de groun’, Mistah Gawd, an’ yo’s pow’ful big an’ hus’lin’ up dah in de sky”—he paused for an instant, as though anticipating an answer, and then resumed deprecatingly—“slingin’ yo’ thundahbolts. Yo’ done hit Miss Anny Nias de fus’ time tryin’,

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an' 'tain' no ways likely yo's gwine tuh miss me now."

Abraham Augustus paused and swallowed convulsively several times; there seemed to be a lump across his throat growing rapidly larger, which at times impeded his utterance.

"I knows I's bad," he continued, swaying his body back and forth in an agony of fear and remorse, much increased by his physical discomfort; "I done pull de tail outen de speckled pullet an' shave de whiskahs offen de cat yis-tiddy mo'nin', but, O Lawd, don' lay dat up ag'in' me! Whut good wuh dey tuh me aftah I got 'em? 'Membah wash-days; who gwine tuh tote de watah fuh mammy 'cep'n' me? 'Membah dat, O good Lawd, an' fling yo' bolt sideways! Shet yo' eyes an' aim keerless, jes' dis wunst; drap it down an' go on 'bout yo' wuck. Yo' ain' got no call tuh wotch

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whuh it fall—all yo's got tuh do is jes'
tuh drap it down.”

A flash of lightning illumined the sky
for an instant as the trembling voice
resumed:

“But ef yo's gwine tuh sling de bolt
straight, Mistah Gawd, mebbe yo' kin
lemme intuh de back gate ob hebbin. I
knows I b'longs tuh Mistah Satan right-
ful, but I don' reckon he gwine tuh miss
me 'mong all de res' ob de liahs in Poke-
town. Don' let him know I's a-comin'
yo' way; jes' open de do' quiet-like and
lemme in. I kin' git thu a mighty li'l
crack an' I won' be no trubble. I'll black
yo' boots an' wash off de do'steps reg-
lah; an' I'll split de kin'lin' too—hones'
I will. Don' let ole Mistah Satan git
behin' me wid he pitchfo'k!”

The first drops of rain fell heavily,
and the thunder rolled ominously.

“Abraham Augustus!” called a voice

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far in the distance, but clear and distinct notwithstanding, “Abraham Augustus!”

“Yaas, suh, Lawd, I hyahs yo’,” replied Abraham Augustus, with chattering teeth.

A sudden sharp twinge of pain caused the boy to bend double with anguish, while at the same moment the lightning flashed vividly and the thunder crashed tumultuously overhead.

“De thundahbolt!” gasped Abraham Augustus, falling heavily to one side; “I done feel it entah intuh me.”

Amanda Araminta watched the retreating figure of her comrade as she balanced uncertainly on the top rail of the fence. For some time she remained lost in thought, then, dropping quickly to the ground, she ran off towards the marsh. Undeterred by the approaching storm, she jumped from tussock to tus-

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sock, peering anxiously about and occasionally calling his name in piercing accents. When the rain began to fall she turned homeward.

“Ain’ gwine tuh git meh bes’ clo’es wet, nohow,” she murmured.

But the storm now broke upon her with its full force, and she speedily became thoroughly drenched and frightened.

“Abra’m ’Gustus!” she wailed, “Abra’m ’Gustus! Whuh is yo’, Abra’m ’Gustus?”

Again the lightning flashed and the thunder crashed loudly. Running blindly about the marsh, alarmed and bewildered, Amanda Araminta stumbled over a dark object. It proved to be Abraham Augustus, and she touched him with trembling finger.

“Is yo’ daid yit?” she whispered.

“Mighty nigh gone,” he responded

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feeble, displaying no surprise at her presence.

The violence of the storm had apparently spent itself in the last outburst, for only a low muttering sounded overhead and the rain fell less heavily.

“Does yo’ feel bad?” inquired Amanda Araminta, thirsting for details. “Huccum yo’ ain’ daid yit, ef yo’ done been laid low?”

“De thundahbolt,” he explained weakly, yet not without a certain pride in the situation, “hit entah intuh me same ez Anny Nias an’ I’s mos’ gone.”

“Whuh it entah?” she queried with awe.

Abraham Augustus indicated the seat of his pain, which perhaps differed slightly in location from the wound of the original Ananias.

Amanda Araminta felt it incumbent to do something, but was in doubt as to

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a proper course of action. Suddenly she remembered her mother's graphic description of an illness at which she had recently presided. The victim again groaned loudly.

"Die a-shoutin'," she cried, springing to her feet and clapping her hands energetically, "die a-shoutin'. Dat's de way tuh git redimption. Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!"

"Hallelujah!" echoed Abraham Augustus rather faintly.

"Glory! *Glory!* Hallelo-o-o-jah! Keep a-shoutin'," called Amanda Araminta, clapping faster, quite carried away with enthusiasm, but her companion lay limp upon the wet grass, so after a while she desisted and sank down beside him in a prayerful attitude, which she considered but proper under the circumstances.

The rain had quite ceased, but both

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children were thoroughly soaked, and the discomfort of her condition began to have its effect upon the temper of Amanda Araminta. Rising and wringing out her wet skirts, she looked longingly towards home; then she stirred the recumbent figure slightly with her foot.

“Is yo’ daid yit?” she inquired at last.

Abraham Augustus opened his eyes and shook his head languidly.

“Hit suttinly do take yo’ a pow’ful long time tuh give up de ghos’,” she remarked heartlessly.

The lips of the sufferer grew yet more ashen.

“Dem aipples didn’ tas’e good no-how,” he said irrelevantly.

Amanda Araminta seized his arm and dragged him to his feet.

“We’s gwine home,” she announced. “Ef yo’s got a thundahbolt in yo’ in-

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nahds, layin' out hyah ain' gwine tuh git it outen yo'."

"I kain' walk nohow," he objected. "Folks whut goes tuh glory goes on dey backs, not on dey feets."

"Ef de daith angel am a-huvverin' ovah yo'," said Amanda Araminta, tow-ing him rapidly along, "he mought ez well huvvah in de house ez outside. Yo' ought tuh been daid by dis time any-how; yo' didn' ketch Anny Nias hangin' on dis a-way!"

"Kain' die no fastah," apologized Abraham Augustus, stumbling along in her wake; "I's gwine soon, sho's yo' bawn. O Lawd!"

Mrs. Bristow, comfortably swaying back and forth in her rocking-chair, was astonished by the entrance of two small, bedraggled figures.

"Sakes alive!" she ejaculated as her

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son threw himself on the floor at her feet, "whut de mattah wid yo'?"

Abraham Augustus groaned and rolled his eyes until only the whites were visible.

"He's a-passin'," said Amanda Araminta excitedly, "he's a-passin' dis time fuh sho'. Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!"

"Abra'm 'Gustus Bristow, whut de mattah wid yo'?" demanded his mother, punctuating her remarks by vigorous shakes.

"He done tole a lie," explained Amanda Araminta, "an' de Lawd struck him daid, same ez Anny Nias. Wid a thundahbolt, Mis' Bristow. Hit done come f'om de sky intuh him, like Miss Hattie say, Mis' Bristow; it lay him low, same ez Anny Nias."

"G'long outen hyah, Mandy Cartah, wid yo' Anny Naises," said Mrs. Bristow as she turned to the mantelshelf and

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took therefrom a bottle. "I dunno who she am, but she wa'n't no fit comp'ny fuh nobody—I knows dat much."

"Don' yo' reckon he gwine tuh die?" inquired Amanda Araminta, watching Mrs. Bristow pour a liberal portion of the contents of the bottle into a glass.

"Laws!" returned Mrs. Bristow indifferently, "sech ez him ain' gethered home airly; he's hyah tuh stay, an' well I knows it. Open yo' mouf."

The last remark was addressed to her son, who turned away his head as she approached.

"Tain' no good tuh git de paregoric, mammy," he said feebly; "I done hyah de v'ice ob de Lawd callin' tuh me outen de clouds down in de ma'sh, an' I done feel de thundahbolt hit me. I done hyah de Lawd callin' tuh me good an' loud."

Amanda Araminta giggled nervously;



"OPEN YO' MOUF!"



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she had begun to doubt the fact of the entrance of the thunderbolt.

“Reckon yo’ hyah *me*,” she said; “I done call yo’ down on de ma’sh ’caze I’s skeert o’ de sto’m.”

“Open yo’ mouf,” repeated Mrs. Bris-tow, forcing the dose upon him and compelling obedience by firmly holding his nose; “next time yo’ makes yo’se’f sick wid green aipples, don’ go blamin’ de Lawd fuh de feelin’s in yo’ insides; dey don’ huht yo’ no mo’ ’en dey ought tuh huht yo’ nohow. Serves yo’ jes’ right, an’ I’s glad of it. Open yo’ mouf an’ swallah dis stuff; does yo’ hyah me talkin’? Swallah it befo’ I makes yo’ wish de thundahbolt had struck yo’ fo’ sho’.”

And Abraham Augustus swallowed.

VI

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“Yo’ ain’ gwine tuh git thu’ de Golden Gate nohow, Aun’ Hestah, ef yo’ ain’ baptized,” said Brother Brice solemnly.

“Laws,” returned Aunt Hester Johnson impatiently, “ain’ I jes’ tole yo’ dat I’s done been sprinkled by de Methodys, an’ de ’Piscopals, an’ de Chillun o’ Zion; an’ I come mighty nigh j’inin’ de sex o’ Lambs o’ Jerooselum las’ wintah. I ain’ noways sho’,” she continued reflectively, “dat I ain’ gwine tuh come intuh de fole o’ dem Lambs yit.”

“De road of de Baptis’ am de sho’ an’ safe way fuh yo’ tuh trabbel, Aun’ Hestah,” replied Brother Brice impressively. “I’s ’stonished dat a lady o’ yo’ refinery kin even study ’bout ’sociatin’ wid de Lambs o’ Jerooselum.”

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Aunt Hester's two hundred pounds of avoirdupois would have rendered her rather a cumbersome lamb, but the gentleman considerably refrained from mentioning this fact.

"Much yo' knows 'bout safe roads tuh trabbel," continued Aunt Hester aggressively; "I knows yo', Kinnard Brice, an' I knows dat yo' kain' follah no straight road nohow ef de chickens happens tuh roos' roun' de co'nah. Don' yo' come hyah speechifyin' tuh me. I tells yo' I's got ez good a show at glory ez yo' has. I's done been sprinkled by de Chillun o' Zion an' de——"

"Aun' Hestah," interrupted Mr. Brice, rising and extending one hand majestically, as though in the pulpit, "ef yo' thinks dem few draps o' watah am gwine tuh float yo' intuh glory, I's sorry fo' yo', Aun' Hestah, 'caze it ain' gwine tuh do it nohow."

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“Whut I got tuh do tuh git dah?” inquired Aunt Hester, somewhat subdued in spite of herself.

“Yo’s got tuh put on yo’ w’ite robes an’ come down tuh de watah, Aun’ Hestah, dat’s whut yo’s got tuh do, same ez othah sinnahs does.”

“An’ aftah I gits tuh de watah, whut den?”

“Den,” said Brother Brice, with all due solemnity, “I takes holt o’ yo’, an’ I dips yo’ up an’ down in de watah twell yo’ sins am washed away.”

“How ’bout meh haid?” said Aunt Hester nervously; “ ’tain’ noways right tuh drownd de haid ’cause o’ de sins o’ de body.”

“Yo’ goes clean undah, Aun’ Hestah,” responded Mr. Brice unctuously; “three times yo’ goes undah, haid an’ all.”

“Hit am puffec’ly scan’lous,” ejacu-

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lated Aunt Hester, holding on to her head, as though to preserve it from injury. "Whuh yo' git sech notions from, anyhow?"

"Read de Book, Aun' Hestah, read de Book. 'Membah John de Baptis'."

"Heap o' diffunce 'twix' yo' an' John de Baptis,'" remarked Aunt Hester unkindly.

"'Membah de watahs o' Johdan,'" pursued Brother Brice rhetorically.

"Heap o' diffunce 'twix' de watahs o' Johdan an' de watahs o' de Appoquini-mink Crick," said Aunt Hester sotto voce.

"Well," said Mr. Brice, turning towards the door, "I leaves yo' tuh yo' 'fleckshuns, Aun' Hestah. I done come hyah 'caze de Session tuck an' p'inted yo' out tuh me ez a fullish virgin an' a riotous livah. Yo's pow'ful shoht breff, I sees; reckon yo' days am glidin'

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swif'ly by. Make yo' peace, Aun' Hestah, make yo' peace. Git yo' sins washed away an' be ready tuh ansuh up when yo' name am called."

So saying Brother Brice departed, leaving Aunt Hester a victim to conflicting emotions, the scorn with which she had received the first remarks of her visitor having been gradually replaced by a vague feeling of apprehension as the pastoral call progressed. She did not like his reference to her custom of puffing heavily after even a trifling exertion, a tendency due entirely to embon-point, but a source of much discomfort and mental disquietude notwithstanding. Aunt Hester laid her hand on that portion of her well-padded anatomy under which her heart was supposed to lie and sighed profoundly.

"We's hyah tuh-day an' gone tuh-morrah," she remarked irrelevantly to

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the empty room as she sank into a rocking-chair and swayed luxuriously to and fro.

Outside the August sun shone brightly and a little brown wren sang cheerfully as he balanced on the slender twig of a lilac-bush which grew very close to the house. A sudden breeze, however, twisted the twig so alarmingly that the bird ceased singing and flew straight before him through the open window into the kitchen; bewildered by his strange surroundings, he fluttered aimlessly about for a moment and finally lighted upon the ample figure in the rocking-chair, his small breast palpitating with fright.

An ashen hue slowly spread over Aunt Hester's chocolate-colored countenance. She threw back her head, gasping, and her bosom heaved as convulsively as that of the bird upon her lap. Twice

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she essayed to speak, but her trembling lips refused to articulate.

“De Sign,” she gasped at last, “de Sign o’ Daith.”

The wren, seeing his opportunity, flew out of the window again and resumed his song, but there was no escape for Aunt Hester from the pall of terror which had descended upon her and enveloped her in its gloomy folds. A bird had flown through the window and lighted upon her; therefore must she die within a year. She looked around her comfortable kitchen and sighed profoundly; truly the flesh-pots of Egypt appeal more strongly to some of us than to others.

Meanwhile, the Reverend Kinnard Brice sat upon his doorstep and pondered deeply; he was somewhat discouraged with the result of his visit. Aunt Hester was an important personage,

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known to have two hundred dollars in bank, and without encumbrances in the way of family. The coffers of the Baptist church sadly needed replenishing, and Brother Brice felt decidedly chagrined at his failure to entice a sheep so well worth shearing into his fold.

“De hahts o’ some,” he reflected mournfully, “am sho’ ‘nuff made o’ stone.”

Something loomed up before him, which at first appeared to be a dark mountain of flesh, but finally resolved itself into the figure of Aunt Hester Johnson.

“Brothah Brice,” said that lady firmly, “I’s come tuh tell yo’ dat I don’ reckon dem sprinkles gwine tuh do fuh me when it comes tuh de p’int. I done been studyin’ yo’ wo’ds, Brothah. Yo’s a pow’ful fine zortah, dat’s whut yo’ is.”

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“De Lawd done put de wo’ds intuh meh mouf,” replied Mr. Brice modestly.

“An’ I’s come tuh ax yo’,” she continued, faltering a little, “when yo’ spec’s tuh ‘merse de nex’ batch o’ sinnahs in de watahs o’ de crick.”

Mr. Brice concealed any natural exultation he may have felt, as he responded impressively,—

“Two weeks f’om yistidday, Aun’ Hestah, de ‘mershun do come off. Is yo’ gwine tuh be dah, Sistah Johnsing?”

Mrs. Johnson replied that she intended being present, and having thus made her first preparation to meet her fate, walked laboriously homeward, reflecting on the uncertainty of human life.

The baptism was scheduled for Sunday immediately following morning service. The preceding Saturday Aunt Hester, wandering dejectedly upon the banks of the creek, chanced to encounter

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Mr. Brice issuing from the little patch of adjoining woodland.

“Whuh yo’ gwine, Aun’ Hestah?” he inquired, skilfully concealing a fishing-line in his pocket; “yo’ had ought tuh be home on yo’ knees, ’stid o’ traipsin’ roun’ on yo’ feets. ’Membah de pack o’ sins yo’s got tuh shed on Sunday.”

“Reckon I kin manage meh knees an’ meh feets mos’ ez well ez yo’ kin,” returned Aunt Hester somewhat tartly. The swiftly flowing current of the Appoquinimink apparently did not appeal pleasantly to her imagination.

“Whut yo’ doin’ hyah yo’se’f?” she continued, fixing her eye upon the bulging pocket of her pastor, whence a fish-hook hung pendent to a bit of string. “Huccum yo’ ain’ home on yo’ own knees, tell me dat?”

“Aun’ Hestah,” he replied solemnly, “I’s gwine tuh tell yo’ whut I’s doin’

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hyah; I's done gone out intuh de wildahness, same ez John de Baptis'. Y-a-a-s, Aun' Hestah; I girds up meh loins an' fasts an' prays in de wildahness tuh take an' git ready fuh de 'mershun on Sunday."

"Am dat a wildahness?" demanded Aunt Hester, indicating the shallow strip of woodland beside them.

"I fasts an' prays," continued Mr. Brice, disregarding the question—"y-a-a-s, Aun' Hestah, dat's whut I does. All dis hyah week I takes an' lives on locusses an' wile honey; dat's all I gits tuh eat de long week thu."

"Whut does yo' do wid dat feesh-hook an' line?" inquired Aunt Hester, pointing at the guilty pocket. Brother Brice, however, was equal to the occasion.

"Dat's whut I ketches de locusses wid," he responded firmly, looking his questioner squarely in the face. "I's

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gwine tuh be a saint some day, Aun' Hestah, ef I eats 'nuff of 'em."

"Brothah Brice," said Aunt Hester suddenly, "I's pow'ful slack 'bout dis hyah 'mershun. Ef yo' don' stay by me all de time, I ain' so sho' I's gwine tuh be dah Sunday."

"Keep a-prayin', Aun' Hestah, keep a-prayin'," said Brother Brice encouragingly.

"Come home wid me, Brothah," she resumed pathetically; "come suppohrt me thu dis hyah tryin' time. Yo' kin eat yo' locusses tuh my house ez well ez in de wildahness; I kin git yo' plenty of 'em."

"I couldn' do hit noways, Aun' Hestah." Brother Brice fingered the pocket holding the fishing-line.

"Well," said Aunt Hester, resolutely turning aside, "I reckon I mought ez well tuhn dat w'ite robe intuh sheets;

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I ain' gwine tuh need it nohow tuh go intuh de watah."

"Won't nothin' else do yo', Aun' Hestah?"

"Ef yo' wants me," said Aunt Hester loftily, "yo's got tuh wuck fuh me. I ain' no cheap niggah."

Casting a regretful glance at the creek, Mr. Brice obediently followed his erratic probationer to her own house.

"Aun' Hestah," he ventured, as they drew near the mansion, "reckon yo' needn' trubble 'bout dem locusses; I's gwine tuh pray double dis time an' hole up on insec's."

"Yo' ain' gwine tuh lose yo' saintship 'caze o' me," returned Aunt Hester reassuringly. "I's got meh niece July an'huh chillun in de house sence de byhd —sence yo' done come tuh see me. Dem boys kin pick up all de locusses yo' wants in de yahd. Ef hit wuh June, now, dey

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mought be sca'se, but bein' ez hit am Augus' dey's thick ez hops. Does yo' like 'em fried er stewed?"

"Yo's pow'ful thoughtful, Aun' Hestah," he replied faintly.

"I ain' got no wile honey," she continued regretfully, "but I reckon good black 'lasses gwine tuh do mos' ez well."

And the digestive organs of Mr. Brice recoiled involuntarily at the prospect of the ordeal before them.

"July," remarked Aunt Hester to her niece on the eventful Sunday morning, "has yo' done tuck Brothah Brice he brek'fus?"

"He say he don' cyah 'bout none," returned July from the depths of the kitchen; "he ain' eat a mossel sense he been hyah."

"He jus' p'intedly got tuh have it," returned Aunt Hester firmly. "Ef dey's

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any 'ligion in locusses, dis hyah am de time he needs it. Lemme put de case tuh him. Dish 'em up good an' hot; I's gwine tuh tote 'em in an' make him eat 'em."

"Pow'ful glad I ain' makin' no tracks todes bein' a saint," ejaculated July fervently as she placed Mr. Brice's breakfast on a plate.

"Brothah Brice," said Aunt Hester, approaching that gentleman as he sat mournfully beside the window, "hyah am yo' locusses."

Brother Brice glanced at the plate and immediately turned away.

"On de mo'nin' o' de Great Day, Aun' Hestah," he replied, "I don' eat nothin'."

"Ef yo' wants tuh baptize me," said Aunt Hester resolutely, "yo's got tuh take an' eat dis hyah."

"I dunno ez I cyah whuthah yo's bap-

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tized er not," he ejaculated, goaded to desperation.

"Brothah Brice," said Aunt Hester, coming closer, "when yo's standin' on de aidge o' de watah in yo' sacrificial robes, would yo' like me tuh up an' tell de company 'bout de raid roostah an' de tukkey hen I seen on yo' shouldah las' wintah, when yo' jes' done pass by Mistah Tuhnah's hen-house?"

Brother Brice started visibly.

"I mought tell 'em 'bout dat black bottle dat drap outen yo' pocket yistidday, when yo' wuh comin' outen de wildahness," she continued relentlessly, "an' 'bout de widdy woman on de tow-path."

Aunt Hester paused and looked earnestly at her companion. She felt that she had the upper hand.

"Reckon yo' mought ez well take an' eat yo' locusses," she remarked suavely,

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and Brother Brice reluctantly began his repast.

“Aun’ Hestah,” inquired July, as they stood beside the Appoquinimink a few hours later, “how does yo’ feel in yo’ mine by dis time?”

“Pow’ful oneeasy,” returned Aunt Hester honestly, casting an apprehensive eye upon the waters beside her.

“I don’ see nohow,” said July thoughtfully, “huccum yo’ tuh let Brothah Brice ‘swade yo’ dis a-way. ‘Tain’ like yo’, Aun’ Hestah, dat’s whut hit ain’.”

“Gal,” replied Aunt Hester severely, shrinking a little from the shadow of a passing bird, “dey’s highah powahs den Brothah Brice done ‘swade me tuh do dis ack. ‘Tain’ safe tuh take no chances ‘bout redimption.”

A large assemblage had gathered upon the banks of the creek from all around

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the neighborhood to witness the immersion. Brother Brice looked steadfastly at them with a sense of his own importance. As on all great occasions, he was arrayed in his gown of dark chintz ornamented with large, colored figures, and his black silk hat. He felt that his costume was appropriate and impressive, and was therefore content.

“Let dem in de w’ite robes ‘semble togathah on meh lef’-han’ side,” he commanded suddenly. “Aftah dey’s done been undah de watah dey ain’ goats no longah an’ kin stand on meh righ’-han’ side ‘mongst de sheep.”

The white-robed candidates accordingly assembled as directed. These robes were shapeless pieces of muslin gathered in at the neck and again about the waist, and were not becoming to forms inclined to rotundity.

“When de hymn am bein’ sung,” con-

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tinued Brother Brice solemnly, "I's gwine tuh wade out ez fah ez I thinks am propah. I spec's Sistah Rebecca Brown tuh wade out an jine me when I beckons tuh huh. Will Sistah Roxy Bristow staht de hymn?"

Mrs. Bristow, according, raised her high, sweet soprano voice in the well-known hymn, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," which was taken up by one after another of the entire company and sung to a finish.

Mr. Brice meanwhile had waded out to the desired location. His gown, being unbuttoned, floated out on the water behind him, and to a near-sighted observer he would probably have suggested some large and unknown piece of spatterdock. His appearance was rather grotesque for a preacher.

"Come on, Sistah Rebecca," he called, beckoning to the chosen one, who ad-

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vanced but slowly. She put one foot in the water and quickly withdrew it. Her face showed fright.

“I done see a watah-snake,” she said in explanation of her retreat.

“Go fohwahd, Sistah Rebecca,” said Brother Noah Hyatt encouragingly; “de mo’ snakes an’ crabs yo’ treads on de greatah yo’ redimption. Don’ yo’ ‘membah dat yo’ evil ackshuns slides f’om yo’ when de watah tech yo’? Dey sometimes takes de shape o’ reptiles, Sistah Rebecca. Dat snake am de fus’ sin yo’s done shed.”

“Glory, glory, halleloojah!” cried Sister Rebecca, taking heart of grace and rushing upon Mr. Brice so suddenly that he nearly capsized.

A dripping, gasping figure returned to the shore and stood shivering in the appointed place. Aunt Hester slowly edged her way towards it, unobserved

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in the excitement of urging another candidate forward.

“Becky,” she whispered, “would yo’ do dat ovah ag’in?”

Sister Rebecca shook her head; speech was not yet possible. Water dripped from her head and face.

“Whut it feel like out yondah?” continued Aunt Hester nervously. “Kin yo’ stan’ solid on yo’ feets?”

“De mud do suck,” said Sister Rebecca briefly, with a sudden return of voice, and Aunt Hester turned thoughtfully away as a second draggled sheep was escorted to the fold.

“Let Sistah Hestah Johnsing come fohwahd,” shouted Brother Brice, now thoroughly imbued with the spirit of his occupation.

“Sistah Hestah Johnsing,” repeated Brother Noah Hyatt; “why ain’ Sistah Johnsing hyah tuh ansuh tuh de call?”

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A dozen officious hands assisted Aunt Hester to the edge of the water. There she stopped, undecided what to do.

“Lemme ahgify wid huh,” said Brother Hyatt, approaching the lady alone and unprotected.

“Roll, Johdan, roll,” sang Sister Roxy Bristow, hoping thereby to divert attention from this unseemly spectacle.

“Aun’ Hestah,” said Brother Hyatt firmly, placing one hand between her shoulders and the other somewhat further down her substantial spinal column, “we ain’ gwine tuh have no puttin’ de han’ tuh de plough an’ lookin’ back. Ef yo’ don’ move intuh dem watahs pow’ful quick de good Lawd am gwine tuh he’p me push yo’ dah.”

Had Aunt Hester been a broncho the sudden humping of her person would doubtless have been called bucking; at all events, Brother Hyatt fell helplessly

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back into the arms of his friends and did not again renew his persuasions.

“Aun’ Hestah,” admonished Brother Brice, “I’s waitin’ fuh yo’, Aun’ Hestah; don’ hole back no longah. Even de li’l byhds o’ de aiah do huvvah ovah yo’ tuh he’p yo’ on yo’ way.”

Aunt Hester cast a terrified glance upward at the flock of wild ducks making their way towards the marsh.

“Will yo’ be dah?” sang Sister Roxy Bristow, persevering in her efforts to fill the embarrassing pause by musical selections, “when de gineral roll am called, will you be dah?”

“I’s a-comin’,” said Aunt Hester, shutting her eyes and advancing blindly. “Lawd ha’ mercy. Glory halleloojah! Amen.”

The current of the Appoquinimink is swift and strong; therefore the immersions had heretofore been made in the

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waters near the shore. Now, however, Brother Brice advanced towards the centre of the stream, towing the reluctant suppliant rapidly behind him. Brother Brice was tall and thin; Sister Johnson was short and fat. Therefore, when the lady was immersed almost to her neck, the head and shoulders of the gentleman were well above water and his arms free for action.

“Sistah Johnsing,” said Brother Brice solemnly, “does yo’ repent yo’ sins an’ evil ackshuns?”

Aunt Hester nodded emphatically; she was most anxious to get the ordeal over and return to terra firma.

“Let yo’se’f loose, Sistah Johnsing,” entreated Mr. Brice as she clung desperately to his arm, “let yo’se’f loose. Is yo’ ready? *Wid dese hyah watahs I renounces yo’ sins washed away.*”

As he rapidly repeated the above for-

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mula he thrust the head and shoulders of Aunt Hester under the water and held her there a second. She emerged puffing like an infuriated porpoise, her eyeballs protruding with fright.

“Don’ yo’ do dat ag’in,” she gasped, regardless of the future.

A very peculiar expression crossed the countenance of Mr. Brice. “Aun’ Hestah,” he said, tightening his hold upon the back of her neck, “dem locusses yo’ done cook fuh me dis mo’nin’ make me see meh duty pow’ful plain; yo’ goes undah, Aun’ Hestah, ez many times ez I chooses. *Wid dese hyah watahs I renounces yo’ sins washed away,*” and under she accordingly went.

Now it was difficult for Mr. Brice to maintain an upright position under the circumstances, and a violent kick in the abdomen from one of Mrs. Johnson’s wandering legs completely doubled him

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up. For a moment they struggled together upon the bed of the Appoquinimink, then rose to the surface and were promptly whirled away with the power of the current. Some distance down the creek they were picked up by a passing boat, faint and exhausted indeed, but still very much alive, and escorted to their respective homes. Meanwhile the congregation dispersed excitedly, loudly discussing this most unexpected ending to the immersion.

Late that evening Brother Brice arose from the couch where he had been deposited under many blankets and with fervent expressions of thanksgiving by some of his faithful sheep. Casting a furtive glance about to make sure that his attendants were asleep, he stole quietly to the pantry and proceeded to devour everything within reach. Sud-

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denly he paused, a loaf of bread in one hand and a slice of cold bacon in the other.

“Wisht I’d tuck an’ hel’ huh undah fuh good an’ all when I had de chance,” he muttered vindictively as he attacked the bacon.

July, seated in Aunt Hester’s kitchen before the fire, lighted to warm blankets to revive the latter when she was carried home, heard a peculiar sound in the next room which emanated from the huge mountain of a feather bed wherein reposed the exhausted lady.

“Whut yo’ say, Aun’ Hestah?” she inquired.

“Laws, chile,” returned Aunt Hester, “I didn’ say nawthin’.”

“Pow’ful bad sign tuh hyah noises f’om de empty aiah,” said July gloomily.

“I don’ b’lieve in signs nohow,” re-

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turned Aunt Hester, comfortably turning over on her side.

Again the mysterious sound.

“Aun’ Hestah,” cried July, “whut de mattah?”

“G’way, chile,” said Aunt Hester, with a deep chuckle, “I jes’ done ‘membah de way Brothah Brice tuck an’ puckah he mouf when he swallah dem locusses.”

VII

THE REGENERATION OF ISAIAH

ISAIAH BRISTOW sat upon the edge of the pigpen and curled his bare toes reflectively. It was scarcely the spot one would have selected as a resting-place, when the whole landscape glowed with the mellow light of autumn and even Poketown was idealized by the scarlet and gold of the maples which bordered its long, straggling street on either side. Isaiah, however, bent his interested gaze into the depth of the pen and turned an unappreciative back towards the beauties of nature.

“Dem hawgs,” he muttered unctuously, “am jes’ p’intedly fat tuh bustin’.”

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Isaiah stretched one leg as far as it would reach and rubbed the back of the nearest pig with his foot. It grunted appreciatively.

“ ‘Tain’ gwine tuh be long now,” he apostrophized, “twell yo’s done salted down intuh spaiah ribs an’ bacon. I’s gwine tuh blow up yo’ bladdah too, an’ bus’ it Chris’mus mawnin’. Y-a-a-s, suh. Sho’s yo’ bawn, I’s gwine tuh do dat. Yo’ done got tuh pay me somehow fuh all de vittles I’s tuck an’ tote tuh yo’ dis long time.”

The pigs snuffed hungrily at their trough. It was quite empty, and Isaiah looked about for means to replenish it; he liked a generous streak of fat in his bacon.

“Uncl’ Willum Staffo’d done say dat brown sugar an’ brandy make a mighty sweet ham,” soliloquized Isaiah as he started for the kitchen.

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In Mrs. Bristow's parlor a solemn conclave was assembled. Brother Kinnard Brice had been speaking, and his right hand was extended, as though in the pulpit.

"No, Brothah," said Mrs. Bristow meekly, in evident response to an interrogation, "Isaiah he ain' got no daddy at de presen' time, so fuh ez I knows."

"Splain yo'se'f, woman, splain yo'-se'f," admonished Brother Brice severely.

"De time done run out," said Mrs. Bristow quietly. "I tuck an' got tied up tuh Ike Bristow befo' de squiah, an' dat on'y las' five yeah; yo' knows dat, Brothah Brice."

"Yaas, dat's so," asserted Aunt Martha Young and Aunt Janty Gibbs simultaneously.

"Yo' am spected tuh go on at de eend

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o' de time ef yo' likes yo' man," said Mr. Brice suggestively.

"Laws," returned Mrs. Bristow impatiently, "I's pow'ful glad tuh git shed o' Ike so easy. He tuck an' run off tuh Noo Jahsey so's he could shake de free laig ag'in long befo' de time run out. A mighty triflin', ornery, no'-count niggah, fo' sho'."

"Isaiah do grow mo' like he daddy ev'ry day," remarked Aunt Martha Young pleasantly.

Mrs. Bristow cast an apprehensive glance about the room.

"Brothah Brice," she whispered anxiously, "whut de mattah wid dat boy, anyhow?"

Brother Brice, being at a loss for an appropriate reply, merely shut his eyes and wagged his head solemnly from side to side, and Mrs. Bristow resumed her complaint.

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“Dey ain’ no livin’ wid him,” she continued, almost tearfully. “He puts ‘baccy in de teapot an’ salt in de sugah; he ties de tails o’ de cats togethah an’ hangs ‘em on de clo’es-line; he done put red peppah on de stove in de chu’ch las’ Big Quahtahly twell de mo’nahs an’ de zortahs all got tuh sneezin’ tuh wunst; he ain’ no morshial good ‘bout de house, ‘cept tuh feed de pigs; he——”

“Sistah Bristow,” interrupted Mr. Brice suddenly, “de chile am p’sessed of a devil.”

“Mo’ likely he’ll be p’sessed *by* de devil,” muttered Aunt Janty Gibbs sotto voce to Aunt Martha Young.

“Y-a-a-s,” reiterated Brother Brice convincingly as Mrs. Bristow’s lower jaw drooped in astonishment, “hit am come tuh me in a vision f’om de Lawd. De Evil Sperrits has done got dey grip on him.”

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“Laws-a-mussy!” ejaculated the ladies in staccato chorus.

“In days of ole,” continued the pastor impressively, “de Evil Sperrits tuck an’ entah dem app’nted fuh de purpose, an’ wras’le in dey insides. Hit am jes’ de same nowadays, meh sistahs. Y-a-a-s, Sistah Bristow, dey wras’le mos’ outlandish.”

“Mussiful powahs!” exclaimed Aunt Janty Gibbs, folding her arms tightly, as though to protect her interior organs from unexpected assault.

“Whuh do dey go in at when dey fus’ entahs yo’ body?” inquired Aunt Martha Young with the evident practical intention of closing her portals.

Brother Brice, looking very wise and virtuous, considered for a moment.

“Dey’s plenty o’ li’l holes, Aun’ Ma’thy, whut leads f’om de outside intuh yo’ unknown cavities *inside*,” he re-

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turned loftily. "Look at yo' nostrils, Aun' Ma'thy, look at yo' nostrils."

"Mighty tight squeeze fuh a sizable devil tuh git in dat a-way," observed Aunt Martha thoughtfully.

"De big ones goes in by way o' de mouf," explained Mr. Brice lucidly, "an' de li'l ones takes de openin's of de yeahs an' de nose an' sich. Dem small Evil Sperrits am pow'ful active wunst dey gits in."

"Isaiah suttinly got a scan'lous big mouf, an' he yeahs zembles de jackass," said his mother reflectively. "I don' seem tuh 'membah he nostrils nohow, but he nose am jes' p'intedly flat tuh he face."

"Do he scratch he nose frequent," inquired Mr. Brice with a profound air.

Mrs. Bristow distinctly recalled seeing her son so engaged several times recently.

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"Dat am 'caze de Evil Ones wuh gwine in," asserted the pastor with conviction; "de mo' dey has tuh scrooge, de mo' dey tickles. I's fear'd, Sistah Bristow, Isaiah am clean beyond redimp-tion. De Book done say, '*Dem whut am p'sessed of devils shell in no wise cas' 'em out.*' "

Brother Brice sometimes got his quotations slightly mixed, but as there was no one to argue the point it did not make very much difference. He now rose and prepared to take his leave, having stated his theory as to the degeneracy of Isaiah entirely to his own satisfaction.

The question at issue was, however, a serious matter to Mrs. Bristow. Existence with Isaiah was troublous at the best of times, and she foresaw direful consequences if he should be pronounced under the spell of evil spirits and therefore irresponsible for his own actions;

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his mother believed that life in the same house with her son would not be worth living under those circumstances. Therefore when she saw her pastor preparing to depart without giving any practical demonstration of his sympathy she placed her ample form in the doorway, thus barring the only egress.

“Cas’ ‘em out, Brothah,” she cried excitedly, “cas’ ‘em out!”

Mr. Brice looked at her in amazement and endeavored to waive her aside that he might cross the threshold, but she steadfastly maintained her position.

“Yo’s done been sanctified,” she continued hurriedly, “yo’s a holy man, Brothah Brice—yo’ done say so yo’se’f. Cas’ ‘em out, I say. Cas’ out dem devils whut’s wras’lin’ inside meh chile. Ef yo’ kain’ cas’ out a few li’l devils, yo’ ain’ no preachah nohow.”

“Amen, dat’s so,” exclaimed Aunt

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Janty Gibbs as though assisting at a church service.

“Ef yo’ kain’ do hit,” said Aunt Martha Young suspiciously, “why don’ yo’ up an’ say so?”

It was not a part of Brother Brice’s creed to admit his inability to meet any requirement of a member of his flock; he therefore temporized weakly.

“Ef yo’s wunst been truly sanctified, Aun’ Ma’thy,” he said with quiet reproach, “yo’ kin cas’ out devils any time yo’ chooses. De on’y reason I don’ take an’ exude ’em f’om dat sufferin’ chile, Isaiah, am ’caze I dunno jes’ whut tuh do wid ’em when I tuhns ’em loose on Poketown.”

“Cas’ ’em out, Brothah, cas’ ’em out!” wailed Mrs. Bristow, with a vivid realization of her difficulties.

“Aun’ Ma’thy,” said Brother Brice solemnly, “is yo’ willin’ tuh take yo’

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chances wid 'em? 'Membah de wo'ds o' de Book. Dem devils jes' p'intedly got tuh entah intuh somebody when deys cas' outen Isaiah."

Now Aunt Martha herself was somewhat a student of Scripture and occasionally surprised her pastor with the result of her research. She had been thinking deeply, and the fruit of her cogitations was expressed in a single word, evidently eminently satisfactory in its import.

"Hawgs," she ejaculated briefly but expressively.

"Whut yo' 'ludin' tuh, Aun' Ma'thy? whut yo' 'ludin' tuh?" said Mr. Brice doubtfully.

"De Book do say," asserted Aunt Martha positively, "dat de devil done entah intuh pigs when hit was cas' outen a pusson, an' de pigs tuck an' drownded deyse'fs."

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“Yo’s wrong, Aun’ Ma’thy,” contradicted Mr. Brice firmly, “de Book don’ say nawthin’ ‘bout pigs. Hit mentions swine, howsomevah, but dey ain’ no swine in dese days.”

“Hawgs am swine,” said Aunt Martha quietly, and Brother Brice realized he could no longer shirk the task of casting out the devil from Mrs. Bristow’s son and heir.

Isaiah, meanwhile, had quietly visited the kitchen and abstracted a portion of the morning’s marketing. His mother had invested in a quarter of a barrel of moist brown sugar, so he filled a bucket to overflowing with it and looked about for something more; a pail of milk was set to rise, and it appeared to him suitable for his purpose. Heavily weighted by a bucket in each hand, Isaiah returned to the pigpen.

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He was not, however, entirely satisfied with the result of his expedition. The chief ingredient he desired was still lacking, and Isaiah rubbed his nose and reflected deeply; if Mr. Brice had been present, he might have remarked that the evil spirits seemed to tickle insistently.

Suddenly a light broke upon the perplexed countenance of Isaiah, and he whistled shrilly as he placed his two pails in a secluded corner and started for the neighboring house on the double quick.

Uncle William Stafford was startled by a series of imperative knocks upon his kitchen door and shuffled hastily across the room to open it. To him appeared Isaiah Bristow in a state of great mental agitation and panting heavily.

“Oh Uncl’ Willum,” gasped Isaiah

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breathlessly, "Mammy done tuck pow'-ful bad wid de mis'ry in huh stummick. She say kin yo' spaiah huh a sip o' gin or mebbe brandy? She jes' bent double, Uncl' Willum, po' Mammy. She done holler out loud wid de mis'ry 'caze hit grip huh so bad."

Uncle William reluctantly produced a cup from his closet.

"Reckon I got tuh do hit," he said ungraciously as he left the room. Isaiah followed him on tiptoe and cautiously opened the door which his host had carefully closed behind him. An expansive grin adorned the countenance of the boy as he returned to the outer doorstep.

"He done keep he jimmyjohn in de woodpile," he chuckled, immediately resuming his former pensive attitude as Uncle William was heard returning.

Strange to relate, Isaiah did not at once return to his suffering mother. He

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secreted himself instead behind the fence and watched Uncle William walk slowly down the street, then repaired to the woodpile and triumphantly produced a half-gallon demijohn. It was nearly full, Uncle William having replenished his stock that very morning, and Isaiah again sought the pigpen, where he proceeded to mix a milk-punch of exceeding strength and sweetness and bestow it upon the two sober and well-conducted swine confined therein. They appeared to find it most palatable.

Isaiah, absorbed in watching the milk-punch disappear, heard voices in the rear, and turning beheld his mother and her guests approaching. Retreat was manifestly impossible, so with much presence of mind he hastily turned a bucket over the empty demijohn and sat down upon it.

“Isaiah,” said Mrs. Bristow, sadly

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reproachful, "whut yo' doin' hyah? I done tole yo' tuh pick up chips."

"I jes' come tuh feed de pigs, Mammy," replied Isaiah innocently.

"Brothah Brice," said Aunt Janty suddenly, "now am yo' chance. Hyah am de chile; hyah am de hawgs. Whut mo' does yo' ask?"

"Git tuh wuck, Brothah, git tuh wuck," added Aunt Martha briskly.

"Dem pigs," said Mr. Brice uneasily, "don' zemble de right breed tuh take in Evil Sperrits. Reckon de Bible swine b'longed tuh de razah-back fambly—dese am too big an' fat."

"Whut de mattah wid de pigs?" demanded Mrs. Bristow, bristling with wounded pride; "dey's de bes' hawgs in Poketown—dem two is."

"Ef de devil entah intuh 'em," said Brother Brice, seeing a possible avenue of escape from his unwelcome task, "yo'

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kain' eat de pork nohow, 'caze it p'izen yo' twell yo's stone daid."

"Hit do seem like a was'e o' good meat," said Aunt Janty regretfully.

Mrs. Bristow, however, was firm. She laid a detaining hand upon the shoulder of her son and announced her intention of sacrificing her winter bacon to insure his welfare. Isaiah squirmed uneasily; he felt apprehensive about the personal turn affairs seemed to be taking.

"We's waitin' fuh yo', Brothah Brice," said Aunt Martha suggestively, and that gentleman at last rose to the occasion. Indeed, he rose in every sense of the word, for he mounted on top of the covered portion of the pen and demanded that Isaiah be hoisted up beside him. This was a work of considerable difficulty, for Isaiah hung back and protested strenuously; but Mr. Brice hauled with a will from above while his mother

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and Aunt Janty pushed vigorously from below, therefore he soon found himself trembling abjectly by the side of Mr. Brice, who placed a detaining hand upon his kinky little poll.

“Git down on yo’ knees,” commanded the preacher, with a slight push, and Isaiah obediently knelt upon the uneven boards of the roof.

The three women also fell upon their knees in front of the pen and piously crossed their arms upon their breasts.

“O Lawd,” said Mr. Brice fervently, “gimme de magic wo’ds whut cas’es out devils; he’p me tuh put a new haht in dis hyah po’ chile; make him diffunt f’om dis houah——”

“Amen, good Lawd, amen!” shouted Mrs. Bristow emphatically.

“Ef dey’s any Evil Sperrits in dis hyah boy,” said Mr. Brice in the distinct tones in which one addresses a

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deaf person, "I commands 'em tuh come fo' th an' entah intuh dem pigs."

He paused expectantly, but nothing happened.

"Let yo' mouf hang open," he remarked to Isaiah, "so's de big devils kin git out easy."

And Isaiah, comprehending nothing, but badly frightened, opened his mouth as wide as nature would permit.

"O Lawd," again entreated Mr. Brice, "don' leave me tuh git thu dis hyah job by mehse'f. 'Tain' no time fuh triflin', dis hyah ain'. Dis chile am chuck full o' devils, good Lawd. Am yo' gwine tuh zert him in he houah o' need?"

"Dem hawgs gittin' mighty oneeasy," said Aunt Janty fearfully.

And, indeed, they were very restless. Uncle William's brandy made up in strength what it lacked in quality, and they felt strangely warm and exhilarated

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internally, as well as disposed to quarrel with one another and rebel at the narrow confines of their pen.

Mr. Brice observed these symptoms complacently, and resumed his exhortations with even greater fervor. His right hand was clinched firmly in Isaiah's hair, and as he raised his arm heavenward at frequent intervals the effect was very painful to his victim, who struggled vainly for freedom.

“Evil Sperrits, big an’ li’l,” began Mr. Brice, “git outen de body o’ dis hyah chile by de same holes yo’ come in. Hyah am de hawgs waitin’ fuh yo’. Dey insides am jes’ ez roomy an’ jes’ ez spacious ez his’n am. I tells yo’ tuh git outen dis boy.”

“Ouch!” wailed Isaiah, “leggo meh haiah.”

“Glory, glory, hallelujah!” shouted Mrs. Bristow, clapping violently as she

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swayed from side to side, “de hawgs has got ‘em. Dey’s got ‘em sho’. Glory!”

“Praise de Lawd! praise de Lawd!” chanted Aunt Janty and Aunt Martha in excited chorus.

Inside the pen the pigs dashed wildly about, knocking against one another and making strange, guttural noises at frequent intervals, a much intoxicated pair.

“Open de do’ at de back o’ de pen an’ let ‘em out,” commanded Mr. Brice, and Aunt Janty flew to obey the mandate.

“De Evil Sperrits am done cas’ outen dis hyah li’l lamb,” said Brother Brice piously, raising his arm very high in thanksgiving; “he am meek an’ lowly f’om dis time fo’th; he——”

“Leggo, I tells yo’,” shrieked Isaiah, who had literally been lifted to his feet by the hair of his head; “does yo’ hyah me? Leggo!”

As Mr. Brice mechanically lowered his

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arm Isaiah seized the opportunity to butt his pastor violently in the abdomen with his head, and they rolled off the roof together.

It was at this moment Aunt Janty elected to open the door of the pen, and the pigs rushed out upon their prostrate bodies. For a moment there was an indiscriminate mass of men and animals; then the pigs ran blindly down the street with Isaiah at their heels and Mr. Brice in hot pursuit. The three women brought up the rear, puffing like porpoises, but determined to be in at the end. The chase was brought to an abrupt termination by the canal, into which the pigs plunged, followed, without an instant's hesitation, by Isaiah; he would, indeed, have jumped into a fiery furnace rather than again submit to the clutches of Mr. Brice.

Now, Uncle William Stafford, in com-

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mon with the rest of Poketown, had been an interested spectator of the race to the canal and had heard with astonishment Aunt Martha Young's account of the miracle just performed, that lady having been unable to keep up with the procession on account of structural solidity. Uncle William was especially surprised to see Mrs. Bristow risen from her bed of suffering and pounding along at no mean speed. He shook his gray head doubtfully as he entered his yard and repaired to the woodpile to refresh himself after his walk, according to custom. The refreshment, however, appeared to be lacking.

“Dat one ornery, sumptious boy,” muttered Uncle William angrily as he shuffled to the fence which divided the two yards. The protecting bucket had been overturned and the demijohn lay revealed to public gaze.

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Uncle William crossed the fence with some difficulty, owing to rheumatism, and took possession of his property. He observed the empty milk-pail and the crumbs of brown sugar scattered upon the ground, also the vacant pigpen. Leaning against the latter he pondered deeply, occasionally shaking his head and threatening vengeance on the absent.

When Mrs. Bristow returned to her house in a highly hysterical condition and accompanied by Aunt Janty she found Uncle William awaiting her, grim and forbidding in aspect.

“Dey’s drownded,” she wailed shrilly, “meh li’l chile an meh two pigs—bofe daid. Laws-a-mussy! Bofe daid an’ gone. Oh, I’s a mizzable sinnah. Sich big, fat hawgs dey wuz. Oh, dear! oh, dear! Isaiah’s drownded. Oh, dear! No bacon dis wintah. O Lawd, ha’ mussy!”

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“Don’ take on so, Sistah Bristow,” said Uncle William coldly, “dey ain’ no hope o’ Isaiah’s bein’ drownded—he gwine tuh live tuh be hung yit.”

And lifting up his empty demijohn Uncle William expounded his theory.

Some little distance down the tow-path a canal-boat landed a dripping, shivering boy and two weary, chastened pigs. The walk back was long and dreary and only accomplished after much trouble, for the pigs showed an irrepressible inclination to lie down and slumber. Isaiah, however, knew better than to appear at home without them; their presence, indeed, was his only chance of salvation. So he urged them onward by violently pulling their tails in the wrong direction whenever they paused to rest, which, as everybody knows, is the only proper way to drive a

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pig, and at last they limped into their yard, as abject a company as one could possibly imagine.

Mrs. Bristow, sitting at her window in a state of great mental exhaustion, saw them approaching from afar off and considered her course of action carefully; she felt averse to further efforts to reform her son and much inclined to ignore the events of the afternoon entirely.

“I done got de smartes’ an’ mos’ ornery boy ez well ez de fattes’, mos’ scan’lous hawgs in Poketown, an’ I reckon I jes’ got tuh put up wid ‘em,” she murmured with a certain pride in her possessions as Isaiah cautiously unlatched the back gate.

VIII

THE RETURN OF SISTER JULIANA

SISTER JULIANA JACKSON was about to enter the Valley of the Shadow. She lay motionless upon the one highly prized feather-bed of the establishment, closely covered with the best patchwork quilt. Outside the mercury wavered uncertainly between ninety and ninety-five degrees, but when one is preparing to renounce earthly treasures forever, one is surely entitled to the best the house affords regardless of temperature. Sister Juliana realized this, and had herself commanded her transfer from corn-husk to feathers when her hours were pronounced numbered.

On her right sat her husband, some-

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what self-conscious in the dignity of his position as chief mourner; on her left was her pastor, ready at any moment with an appropriate text or a few words of prayer; at the foot of the bed crouched old Aunt Judy; and at the head stood Sister Roxy Bristow, waving a large turkey-feather fan to and fro with a slow, rhythmical movement.

“Sistah Juliana,” said the pastor anxiously, “how does yo’ feel in yo’ sperrit, Sister Juliana?”

Not even the quiver of an eyelid betrayed that the recumbent figure understood his remark. Her husband leaned forward and took her hand in his, but it fell limp and nerveless from his grasp. Mrs. Bristow immediately restored it to its former position.

“Hit am mo’ fittin’, Brothah Jackson,” she said severely, “fo’ a soul tuh go tuh glory wid de ahms crossed pious-

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like on de breas' den tuh let 'em mean-dah all ovah de baid."

Brother Jackson groaned heavily in response.

"Take me wid yo', Juliana," he entreated earnestly, "take me wid yo'."

Old Aunt Judy raised her quavering voice in indignant protest.

"Don' yo' do hit, Juliana," she cried quickly. "Git away tuh glory 'thout no triflin' niggahs hangin' tuh yo' petticoats. Git off by yo'se'f, honey, when yo' kin; don' yo' make no mistake 'bout dat."

"Aun' Judy," remonstrated the pastor sadly, "whut yo' done say am empty wo'ds. Sistah Juliana ain' gwine tuh have no petticoats in de Noo Jerooselum fuh nobody tuh hang on tuh."

"Take me wid yo', Juliana," repeated the sorrowing husband, "I wants tuh git in too."

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“ ‘Tain’t noways likely yo’s gwine tuh git in ef yo’ don’ go wid huh,” muttered Aunt Judy unkindly.

“Brothah Reese,” interposed Mrs. Bristow hastily, “kain’t yo’ light de way fuh Sistah Juliana wid de lamp o’ prayah?”

“I done set huh gropin’ soul on de straight an’ narrah way twict in de las’ houah, Sistah Roxy,” responded Reese huskily, “an’ meh mouf do feel pow’ful dry an’ pa’ched-like fo’ sho’.”

It appeared to be a matter of indifference to Sister Juliana whether her way was lighted by prayer or darkened by neglect.

“In de kitchin,” suggested Mr. Jackson, in properly subdued accents, “dey’s cookin’ de funeral ham. Reckon yo’ mought step out an’ see whut mo’ yo’ kin find, Brothah Reese.”

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And Brother Reese stepped out with some celerity.

“Brothah Jackson,” said Mrs. Bristow softly, “I feels fo’ yo’, Brothah Jackson.”

“I knows yo’ does, Sistah Roxy,” he replied gratefully.

An almost imperceptible movement stirred the surface of the patchwork quilt, and both watchers concentrated their attention upon it for a moment.

“De rus’le o’ de Daith Angil,” whispered Mrs. Bristow, with a long sweep of her fan; “he done huvvah ovah Sistah Juliana dat time.”

“He flap he wings an’ pass huh by onet mo’,” returned Mr. Jackson in awe-struck tones, and again they lapsed into silence, while Aunt Judy raised her head and gazed intently at the bed.

“I’s gwine tuh be pow’ful lonely,” said Mr. Jackson, with a heavy sigh.

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“Dat’s so, Brothah Jackson, dat’s so,” agreed Mrs. Bristow sympathetically, “but hit am de will o’ Gawd. I done been lonely mehse’f dis long time, sence Jake tuck an’ got hisse’f drownded in de Pigeon Run.”

“Hit don’ seem,” said Mr. Jackson thoughtfully, “ez ef de watah in de Run wuh deep ’nuff tuh drownd Jake no-how.”

“Ef yo’s too drunk tuh git outen a mud-puddle, I reckon yo’ mought git drownded ef yo’ nose wuh in de mud,” returned Mrs. Bristow somewhat shortly, but as though the subject did not interest her personally.

“I kin fry yo’ bacon fuh yo’ ev’ry mo’nin’,” she volunteered, after a slight pause. “Yo kin git it ovah de fence.”

“Yo’s pow’ful thoughtful, Sistah Roxy,” he responded sadly, “hit am lucky de gyahdens j’ines at de back.”

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“Yo’ mought take down some o’ de fence so’s I kin run in an’ out an’ keep yo’ house clean,” she suggested further.

“Yo’ sho’ am gwine tuh be a comfo’t tuh a lonely widdah-man, Sistah Roxy,” he returned appreciatively.

Again there was a slight movement of the quilt, and again they watched breathlessly for the flight of the spirit of Sister Juliana, which, however, still clung tenaciously to its house of clay.

Brother Jackson wiped the beads of perspiration from his forehead and glanced over his shoulder at the door communicating with the kitchen, whence came appetizing odors and the subdued hum of many voices.

“I done been settin’ on dis hyah stool sence airly mo’nin’,” he remarked, plaintively.

“Yo’ sho’ done yo’ bes’ tuh make de

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passin' easy fuh Sistah Juliana,"' returned Mrs. Bristow warmly; "'tain't many men kin set so quiet at a time like dis hyah. Dey mos'ly gits rampageous when de ham begins tuh bile."

"Don' yo' speechify 'bout hams,"' he said mournfully. "Juliana set sich stock on 'em dat de grunt o' de pig am like tuh bus' meh haht, Sistah Roxy."

Sister Roxy waved her fan mechanically and glanced about the apartment in a proprietary manner.

"Dem wax-flowahs hadn' ought tuh set so close tuh de windah nohow,"' she remarked irrelevantly; "de sun done melt de watah-lily scan'lous."

"Yo' kin change de place, Sistah Roxy,"' replied Mr. Jackson obligingly; "ack ez ef de house wuh your'n, an' do jes' whut yo' 'zires,"' and Mrs. Bristow smiled as though satisfied as she moved

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the glass case of waxen blossoms to the other side of the room.

“I feels faint-like and hollah inside,” resumed the gentleman after a long silence. “Dis am a mighty sad ‘casion fuh me, Sistah Roxy, an’ meh haht am soon gwine tuh be ez empty ez meh stummick, but hit am de will o’ Gawd, ez yo’ done ‘pinionate, Sistah.”

“De stummick,” remarked the lady reflectively, “kin git filled up an’ easy-like ag’in. How ‘bout de haht, Brothah Jackson, how ‘bout de haht?”

“Sistah Roxy,” he returned sorrowfully, “will yo’ walk home wid me f’om de grave when we lays Juliana away? I’s gwine tuh need de suppoht o’ frien’s ez well ez ‘ligion tuh keep me up, Sistah.”

“Brothah Jackson,” she responded, with evident appreciation of the compliment, “yo kin lean on me ef yo’ so ‘zires.

RETURN OF JULIANA

I's gwine tuh he'p yo' beah up undah yo' 'fliction, Brothah Jackson."

"Sistah Roxy," he replied gallantly, "come wid me tuh de kitchin. Yo' an' me has done set hyah dis long time wotchin' fuh de Daith Angil tuh light on Julianah. Yo' mus' be tired an' hungry, 'caze yo' done fan huh long an' faithful. Lemme conduc' yo' tuh de kitchin, Sistah Roxy. Aun' Judy kin wotch out fuh de flies."

Had the patient watchers looked behind them as they transferred the fan to Aunt Judy and made a hasty exit, they might have observed that Sister Julianah's eyes had opened and were fixed upon them with the expression of one who contemplates earthly rather than heavenly transactions.

"Juliana," whispered Aunt Judy, bending close over the bed, "does yo' see him, Julianah?"

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But the heavy eyelids dropped wearily as though to shut out forever all unwelcome sights.

“She done move yo’ flowahs, honey,” continued the old woman; “she tuck an’ move yo’ flowahs f’om de place yo’ done s’lected. Does yo’ hyah me, Juliana?”

Juliana, however, still remained indifferent to transitory things.

“Dey done kill yo’ raid roostah,” resumed Aunt Judy eagerly, “an’ de ole speckled hen too, tuh bile fuh de funeral dinnah. Dey done got yo’ mos’ buried, honey. Does yo’ hyah me, Juliana? *He* am up tuh he same ole tricks; dey ain’ a mo’ flirtatious niggah in Poketown den Jeremiah Jackson.”

Aunt Judy paused for breath and gazed intently at the motionless figure.

“Don’ yo’ go, Juliana,” she continued insistently, “don’ yo’ give dat no-

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'count niggah no chance tuh shake de free laig ag'in."

Encouraged by a slight quiver of the eyelid, Aunt Judy went on breathlessly:

"Does yo' zire Roxy Bristow tuh set up in yo' house an' fry yo' bacon? Is yo' gwine tuh 'low huh tuh move yo' flowahs an' pass de time o' day wid yo' husban' ovah yo' haid? Come back an' spite 'em, Julian. Come back, honey! I knows yo' kin, 'caze yo' time ain' come yit; I knows hit by de Almanac. Come back, I tells yo'! Julian, does yo hyah me? *Juliana!*"

The door opened suddenly to admit Brother Reese, who entered with the sleek and unctuous manner of one who has dined to repletion upon greasy but highly satisfactory viands. He was followed by a mixed assembly of neighbors who had been assisting in the preparation of the funeral meats, and finally by

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Brother Jackson and Sister Roxy, who at once resumed their former positions.

“Sistah Juliana,” inquired Brother Reese with interest, “has yo’ gone home, Sistah Juliana?”

“Take me wid yo’, Juliana,” said Mr. Jackson, returning mechanically to his former appeal, with the air of one who knows the proper thing to say under the circumstances.

“Say a few wo’ds tuh he’p us all, Brothah Reese,” urged Mrs. Bristow, taking possession of the fan; “we’s all got tuh follah aftah Sistah Juliana some day. Light de dahk way, Brothah, light de dahk way.”

“Meh frien’s,” said Brother Reese, rising and spreading his hands out over the bed, “yo’ sees befo’ yo’ a soul bustin’ f’om a sinful body. De body am de dus’ o’ de yearth; de soul am de clouds o’ de aih.”

RETURN OF JULIANA

“Amen, dat’s so,” agreed Mrs. Bristow emphatically.

“Some clouds,” continued Brother Reese earnestly, “am black, an’ some am w’ite, same ez some skins am black an’ some am w’ite. De good folks has de w’ite souls an’ de bad folks has de black, no mattah whut skin dey had tuh begin wid.”

“Glory, glory, halleloojah!” shouted Mrs. Bristow triumphantly.

“Hit ain’ fuh me tuh say whut am de colah o’ Sistah Juliana’s soul,” resumed the preacher sadly; “she wuh mo’ apt tuh set tuh home den go tuh chu’ch; she done cook an’ wuck roun’ de house on de Day o’ Res’; an’ she tuhn huh yeah frequent tuh de ’ticemints o’ ole Satan, but I hopes huh soul am w’ite. Y-a-a-s, good Lawd, I *hopes* huh soul am w’ite.”

Quite overcome by his own eloquence, Brother Reese paused dramatically and

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mopped his forehead, evidently forgetting that the soul of Sister Juliana still lingered in its earthly habitation.

“Sistah Roxy,” he commanded pompously, “keep de flies offen de co’pse, Sistah Roxy.”

The eyes of Sister Juliana slowly opened a second time.

“I ain’ daid yit,” she said quietly.

The effect of this assertion upon the assembled company was somewhat paralyzing. Brother Reese, however, immediately recovered his self-possession.

“Repent, Sistah Juliana,” he cried loudly; “de Lawd done give yo’ dis li’l time longah tuh spachiate yo’ sins. Now’s yo’ chance, Sistah Juliana, now’s yo’ chance.”

“A-a-amen!” chorussed the excited neighbors, who now filled the little room almost to the point of suffocation.

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Sister Juliana turned her troubled eyes towards the kitchen door.

“Yo’ done lef’ de tea-kittle on de fiah ’thout no watah, an’ hit am gwine tuh bus’ ef yo’ ain’ cyahful,” she said feebly, and, indeed, an odor of red-hot iron permeated the apartment.

“Juliana,” cried Aunt Judy hysterically. “Yo’ done hyah me, Juliana. Praise de Lawd!”

“Dis ain’ no ’casion tuh think ’bout kittles, Sistah Juliana,” remonstrated the preacher; “let yo’ las’ wo’ds be fuh de husban’ who done wotch an’ pray by yo’ dis long time.”

“Ain’ yo’ got no wo’d fuh me, Juliana?” inquired that gentleman pathetically.

Sister Juliana caught weakly at the feathers of the fan as it passed annoyingly close to her nose.

“Stop dat!” she commanded irrita-

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bly, and Mrs. Bristow paused in astonishment.

“Lawd,” entreated Brother Reese fluently as he dropped upon his knees, “reach out yo’ ahms tuh dis po’, flutterin’ li’l soul. Hit am on’y a po’, weak female woman, good Lawd, yo’ knows dat. She done fall by de wayside maybe, but of c’ose she kain’ be strong tuh ’zist ole Satan like a man am strong.”

“Lis’en tuh dem wo’ds, good Lawd,” interpolated the sorrowful husband.

“She ain’ gwine tuh have de ahm o’ huh husban’ tuh suppoht huh thu’ de Noo Jerooselum,” continued Brother Reese fervently, “she am on’y——”

“Say ‘Amen,’ ” interrupted Sister Juliana irreverently as she sat upright in her bed and glared inhospitably at her uninvited guests, “say ‘Amen’ quick, now, an’ git offen yo’ knees.”

“Huh mine do wandah,” said Brother

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Reese charitably as he rose obediently.
“Prepare fuh de wuss, Brothah Jackson, prepare fuh de wuss. De houah am come. Lawd, open de Golden Gate an’ let dis sinnah in.”

Sister Juliana pointed with trembling finger to the outer door.

“Yo’ mought ez well go home,” she remarked to her astonished neighbors, “dey ain’ gwine tuh be no funeral in dis hyah house yit a-whiles.”

“Juliana,” cried Aunt Judy joyfully, “yo’s back ag’in fo’ sho’, honey.”

One by one the guests departed silently, omitting the customary farewell to the hostess.

“Reckon yo’ mought ez well light out wid ’em,” suggested that lady to her pastor, who shook his head mournfully as he complied with the request.

Sister Juliana then turned to her husband, resolution in her whole attitude.

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“Put back dem wax flowahs,” she commanded quietly.

“Jes’ ez yo’ ‘zires, Juliana, jes’ ez yo’ ‘zires, honey,” he replied, hastening to obey her mandate.

“Good-by, Sistah Roxy,” she murmured, sinking wearily down in her feather bed; “Aun’ Judy kin show yo’ de way outen de *front* do’. Sistah Roxy, yo’ needn’ trubble yo’se’f ‘bout no back fence; we’s gwine tuh move ‘cross de bridge next month anyhow. Aun’ Judy, open de front do’ fuh Sistah Roxy.”

And Aunt Judy did so with alacrity.

“Fole up de patchwuck quilt,” continued Mrs. Jackson, addressing her husband, “an’ tote in de cawn-shuck mattress—kain’ wais’ dis hyar good feathah baid tuh git well in.”

“Juliana,” he ventured deprecatingly, “honey, is yo’ sho’?”

“Git tuh wuck,” she interrupted ruth-

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lessly. "Yo' ain' gwine tuh walk home f'om *my* grave on yo' tip-toes wid Roxy Bristow nohow, 'caze dey ain' gwine tuh be any grave. Yo' done thunk de noise o' de cherrybims pickin' dey banjoes fill meh yeahs twell I didn' hyah yo' speechify wid huh. I done see de sheep's-eyes yo' tuck an' cas' at huh ovah meh dyin' baid. Git de cawn-shuck mattress,"— Sister Juliana paused and looked long and earnestly at her lord and master,— "yo' ornery, lazy, triflin', big-mouf niggah!" she finished impersonally, her voice growing faint from physical weakness.

The change was finally effected and Mrs. Jackson reposed uncomfortably upon her knobby corn-husk bed covered with a sheet of unbleached muslin, weary but triumphant.

"Pull down de windah shades," she commanded her husband, recalling that

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gentleman as he was about to steal quietly from the room, "an' set down on dat stool tuh keep de flies offen me. I wants tuh take a nap. Git a fan now an' go tuh wuck."

Throughout the remainder of the long summer day Brother Jackson sat alone beside the wife so unexpectedly returned to him from the brink of the grave, and waved his feather fan, even as Mrs. Bristow had wafted it a few hours previous. Did he falter in his duty, overcome by the drowsiness inseparable from the quiet of the room and the monotony of his occupation, a querulous voice recalled him from oblivion with the indisputable assertion:

"I ain' daid yit, Jeremiah Jackson. I's come back, I has. Keep on fannin', I's still hyah."

IX

A VERY WISE VIRGIN

“DEY wuz ten o’ dem virgins,” said Lavinia Simmons sulkily.

“Laws-a-mussy,” returned her mother briskly, “ain’ dey mo’ en ten shif’less, no’-count gals loafin’ roun’ Poketown, tell me dat??”

Lavinia murmured an assent.

“Five of ’em wuz wise, an’ five of ’em wuz fullish,” continued Mrs. Simmons, bringing her iron down upon the garment spread before her with considerable force. “Dem ez wuz wise lighted dey lamps an’ cotched dey man all safe; dem ez wuz fullish stayed ole maids.”

“Whut yo’ speechifyin’ tuh me dis a-way fuh??” demanded Lavinia with an aggrieved air.

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“ ‘Caze hit am pow’ful shameful fuh a gal tuh be a’ ole maid, an’ ef yo’ don’ up an’ hus’le fuh a bridegroom yo’s gwine tuh be one sho’. Does yo’ s’pose dem virgins set on de sofy an’ waited tuh be co’ted? No, suh! dem gals up an’ hunted fuh deyselves, dat’s whut dey done.”

Lavinia muttered that she did not care.

“An’ whut’s mo’,” continued her mother reflectively, “hit don’ seem tuh me ez ef ole maids gits tuh heav’n. Leas’ways, I don’ ‘membah no menshun of ‘em gittin’ pas’ old Petah at de Gate.”

“Dey ain’ nawthin’ wicked ‘bout ole maids,” said Lavinia, in faint protest against such wholesale exclusion.

“Hit am dis a-way,” explained Mrs. Simmons condescendingly. “Ef a gal ain’ got gumption ‘nuff tuh hook a man

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o' some soht, den dey ain' got no use
fuh huh Up Above. Ef she kain' do dat,
she kain' do nawthin' nohow."

"Whut mus' I do fus'?" inquired
Lavinia with the air of a martyr.

"Dat am 'co'din' tuh who yo' has yo'
eye on," said her mother reflectively;
"dey's a heap o' diffunce in men. Some
of 'em 'zembles flies—ef yo' wants tuh
ketch 'em, all yo's got tuh do am tuh set
wid yo' mouf open an' in dey draps."

Mrs. Simmons took a fresh iron and
held it near her cheek to ascertain its
temperature.

"But den, ag'in, dey's men," she re-
sumed slowly, "whut yo' has tuh ack
mighty cautious-like wid, an' sasshay
roun' on yo' tip-toes ez faskinatin' ez
de young guzelle."

Mrs. Simmons's ideas of gazelles were
somewhat hazy, but she believed them to
be a species of enchantress.

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"Hit 'zembles huntin' aftah possums," she said thoughtfully; "de mo' yo' has tuh chase, de mo' tickled yo' am in yo' *insides* when yo' gits him up a tree fo' sho'. 'Tain' de same feelin' yo' has fuh de runts yo' gits 'thout no wuck tuh ketch 'em."

"Heap mo' trubble," said Lavinia, yawning.

"Heap sweetah possum," returned her mother briefly as she put away her ironing-board and prepared to carry home the clothes.

On her way she mentally reviewed all the eligibles of Poketown, not omitting Brother Noah Hyatt, notorious for his aversion to the fair sex. Mrs. Simmons walked around his neat little cottage and regarded it with evident approval.

"Dey'd be some credit tuh de gal whut could tree Brothah Hyatt," she murmured as she resumed her line of march.

A VERY WISE VIRGIN

A knot of her cotemporaries were gathered at the door of Aunt Martha Young, excitedly discussing some subjects of absorbing interest.

“He done got a house wid a gyah-din,” exclaimed Aunt Martha as Mrs. Simmons approached.

“An’ a yallah meule an’ a no-top buggy wid blue wheels,” added Aunt Janty Gibbs.

“A melojon in he bes’ room, pictuhs on he walls, an’ two pigs, fat tuh bustin’, in he pen,” supplemented Sister Rebecca Brown, who had a taste for the material as well as the ornamental.

“An’ he done guv out at de sperience meetin’ ovah in Sin Go’ges dat he on de lookout fuh a wife,” finished Mrs. Mary Jane Finney breathlessly.

Mrs. Simmons deposited her basket of clothes on the ground and paused resolutely. The conversation interested her.

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“Whut he name?” she demanded succinctly.

“He name,” said Aunt Janty, evincing no surprise at her presence, “am Willum Smith, an’ he live on de Dutch Neck Road. He got ‘nuff hog meat salted down tuh las’ all wintah, an’ fifty dollahs in de bank.”

“Laws!” ejaculated Mrs. Simmons, quite overcome by the last statement.

“I reckon Vinny gwine tuh walk in de cakewalk down tuh Poht Penn nex’ week,” continued Aunt Janty thoughtfully. “Mistah Smith done ‘low dat he gwine tuh be dah tuh look de gals ovah an’ take he pick. All de Poketown gals will walk dey pretties’, ‘caze dey ain’ no tellin’ whuh de lightnin’ mought strike. I’s got a new frock fuh ‘Liza, an’——”

“Aun’ Janty,” interrupted the severe voice of Brother Hyatt, who had ap-

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proached from the rear, "whut dat I hyah? I's 'stonished at yo', Aun' Janty, dat's whut I is—'stonished. Yo' bettah set 'Liza tuh makin' huh shroud, so's huh wicked mind kin study 'bout hell an' damnation. Cakewalks am 'ticemints o' ole Satan. Keep de gal home, Aun' Janty, keep de gal home."

"Dat whut I say, Brothah Hyatt, dat whut I say," interrupted Mrs. Simmons eagerly; "gals am bes' tuh home. Vinny ain' gwine nohow ef I kin keep huh back."

Brother Hyatt walked on down the street by the side of Mrs. Simmons. It was a question which agitated Poketown for some time whether the lady moved first and the gentleman joined her, or vice versa.

"Brother Hyatt," said Mrs. Simmons timidly, "kin yo' drap in tuh my house an' zort wid Vinny? She done got so

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wor'ly-minded dat I trimbles fuh huh
lattah eend."

"Wotch an' pray, Sistah Simmons,
wotch an' pray," counselled Mr. Hyatt
solemnly.

"De nights an' days I spen's on meh
knees wras'lin' wid ole Satan ovah dat
gal yo' wouldn' hahdly b'lieve, Brothah
Hyatt," said Mrs. Simmons, and, indeed,
Mr. Hyatt would have been surprised
could he have known the exact number
of said petitions.

"Bring de gal befo' de Session," he
said grimly; "dey knows how tuh han'le
obstropolous sinnahs."

These very decided measures, how-
ever, formed no part of the designs of
Mrs. Simmons, and before she parted
from Mr. Hyatt at her own gate she had
extorted a promise from him to inter-
view Lavinia privately and point out the
error of her ways, particularly with ref-

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erence to cakewalking. Lavinia herself, at the front window, greeted her mother with a nervous giggle.

“Yo’ done kotch ole man Noahy Hyatt,” she said tauntingly, “but yo’ couldn’ git him no closah dan de gate.”

Mrs. Simmons was so much engrossed with her budget of news that she took no notice of the gauntlet thus daringly flung. She told Lavinia of the prospective cakewalk, and of Mr. William Smith in search of a wife. The prospects of the future Mrs. Smith were painted in glowing colors and his bank account multiplied by three.

“An’ now,” finished Mrs. Simmons, “who yo’ gwine tuh walk de cakewalk wid?”

“Willum Smith,” said Lavinia reflectively. “Laws! I ‘membahs him. He a mighty big-mouf, long-heeled niggah fo’ sho’.”

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“Reckon he mouf ain’ no biggah dan yo’ own,” returned her mother in a withering manner, “an’ a lady ain’ got no ’casion tuh ’lude tuh a gen’leman’s heels nuthah; dey has tuh have ’em, of co’se, but yo’ ain’ got no call tuh speak ’bout ’em.”

“I ’membahs him,” said Lavinia again in evident retrospect, “wid he bow laigs an’ he fat stummick; laws-a-mussy! I ’membahs him.”

“Yo’ didn’ ketch dem virgins talkin’ dat a-way ’bout de bridegroom,” said Mrs. Simmons reprovingly, and Lavinia became suddenly silent.

“Yo’ got tuh walk dat cakewalk,” remarked her mother decidedly, “an’ yo’ got tuh step out yo’ spryes’. ’Liza Gibbs an’ Sally Finney an’ all de gals gwine tuh be dah, same ez de virgins of ole. Who yo’ gwine tuh walk wid?”

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“James Pollahd done 'low he gwine tuh ax me when de nex' cakewalk wuh called,” said Lavinia tentatively.

“He a mighty no-'count niggah, but he do walk pow'ful spry an' he know jes' how tuh shake an' bend he laigs fo' sho',” said Mrs. Simmons, adding somewhat irrelevantly, “Brothah Hyatt am gwine tuh drap in some night an' wras'le wid yo' 'bout cakewalkin' an' sich.”

“Den whut I gwine tuh do 'bout it?” inquired Lavinia nervously.

“Laws-a-mussy!” said her mother impatiently, “ain' yo' got no sense? Yo's gwine tuh snuffle an' wipe yo' eyes frequent when Brothah Hyatt zorts, an' up an' tell him dat yo's ready tuh give up all sich wicked ackshuns 'caze he axed yo' to. An' yo's got tuh say, kine o' low-voiced an' teary, ‘Pray fuh me, Brothah Hyatt, pray fuh me,’ or some sich wo'ds.”

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“Whut den,” asked Lavinia, much interested.

“Well,” returned her mother, with a deep chuckle, “when Brothah Hyatt am down on he knees prayin’ fuh yo’, yo’ kin be on yo’ own two feet treadin’ de cakewalk fuh Mistah Smith.”

Lavinia laughed and clapped her hands delightedly.

“But ef Mistah Smith don’ s’lect yo’,” continued Mrs. Simmons warningly, “yo’s got tuh light out tuh Brothah Hyatt’s house nex’ day an’ up an’ tell him dat yo’ kain’ ‘zist ole Satan nohow ‘thout he be by yo’ side tuh suppoh yo’. Dat’s de way tuh fotch a man like him.”

Mrs. Simmons now produced a lantern and trimmed the wick carefully. Lavinia watched her with interest.

“Git de coal-ile,” she commanded her daughter, “an fill it chuck full.”

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And Lavinia obeyed, wondering greatly.

“On de night o’ de cakewalk,” volunteered Mrs. Simmons, “yo’s gwine tuh light yo’ lamp an’ staht fo’ Poht Penn; yo’s gwine tuh lingah on de road twell yo’ sees Mistah Smith’s yallah meule an’ he no-top buggy comin’ to’ds yo.”

“Whut den?” said Lavinia breathlessly.

“Den,” said her mother quietly, “ef yo’s got any sense, yo’s gwine tuh ride de res’ o’ de way side o’ Mistah Smith in he no-top buggy.”

Kerosene oil was in great demand in Poketown on the morning of the cakewalk. Lavinia had imparted her mother’s plan to her chosen friend, Wilhelmina Stafford, and it had accordingly been transmitted from one to another until all the chaperones of Poke-town were in the market for oil, feeling

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it best to leave no stone unturned to insure success; and many a reluctant virgin was therefore started off on foot, accompanied only by her lantern, in the direction of Port Penn.

Mr. William Smith stood before his mirror and put the finishing-touch to his toilet in the shape of a paste solitaire about the size of a marble. Mr. Smith fastened it carefully in his red cravat and retreated a few paces to note the effect. Evidently it was satisfactory, for he smiled broadly, as though content. He then drew from his pocket a ring with a setting the size of his scarf-pin and looked at it affectionately.

“Hit do seem like a pity tuh was'e it on some triflin’ yallah gal,” he soliloquized as he returned it to its resting-place.

Evidently Mr. Smith was not a cheerful giver.

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"Reckon I's gwine tuh be mighty sorry fuh dis 'hyah night's wuck," he muttered as he unhitched his yellow mule, "but de Scriptuh say 'tain' good fuh man tuh live alone, an' I done cal-c'late dat hit gwine tuh be cheapah tuh suppohht a wife den tuh put meh woshin' out."

So saying Mr. Smith drove off in the direction of Port Penn.

Brother Noah Hyatt had been to see Lavinia, according to promise. He had admonished sternly, warned gravely, pleaded ardently, and finally persuaded gently. Brother Hyatt was naturally as unsociable as Diogenes, but he was human. Lavinia was soft of voice and slight of form, with eyes not unlike the young gazelle, to whom her mother so often referred. She was open to conviction and overcome with remorse at her

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sins of omission and commission; she had wept copiously and promised amendment; and finally had confessed that she doubted her ability to keep to the straight and narrow way without the assistance of Brother Hyatt to guide her wandering footsteps. Verily Lavinia had lights trimmed and burning in several directions, and was a very wise virgin indeed.

Brother Hyatt became deeply interested. Here, it seemed to him, was a brand well worth snatching from the burning. It would not be unpleasant, he reflected as he washed his supper-dishes, to have such duties performed by a swiftly moving, trim-waisted young wife. He thought of the brand smouldering in the cinders of worldliness, sighed, shook his head and his dish-cloth simultaneously, and decided to snatch.

His evening chores completed, Mr.

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Hyatt repaired to the Simmons home-stead and knocked as one having authority. There was no response. Again he knocked, and the window of the adjoining house was raised cautiously.

“Dey ain’ nobody home,” said a voice from within, “dey’s all done gone tuh de cakewalk.”

Brother Hyatt set his teeth and squared his shoulders.

“I’s gwine aftah huh,” he muttered; “I’s gwine tuh bring de lamb safe tuh de fole.”

And with this pious declaration on his lips and bitter resentment in his heart at the duplicity of the lamb, Brother Hyatt started forth in the direction of Port Penn.

The first notes of the brass band, imported from New Castle for the occasion, were wafted upon the night air as

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Lavinia drove into Port Penn seated beside Mr. William Smith in his blue-wheeled buggy. It happened thus.

Mr. Smith, driving slowly along, found his progress impeded by a female figure which stood in the road and waved a lantern under the very nose of the yellow mule.

“Who dat?” called the gentleman impatiently.

“Ef yo’ please, suh,” said a soft voice in reply, “I’s done los’ meh way. Kin yo’ tell me how tuh git tuh Poht Penn?”

After a little more conversation, during which the lady several times mentioned how tired she was, Mr. Smith proffered the half of his buggy, and, incidentally, enjoyed the remainder of the drive very much.

“Whut all dem gals streakin’ ‘long by deyse’f fuh, wid lantahns tuhned up so high dey jes’ p’intedly smokin’?” in-

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quired Mr. Smith as they passed one virgin after another, weary and foot-sore, but persevering.

“Dunno,” replied Lavinia innocently as she passed her friends with no sign of recognition.

The cakewalk was a success. Never were girls so light of foot and coquettish of manner; one couple after another pirouetted down the long room, posturing, bowing, and executing intricate and difficult steps to the strains of the “Georgia Camp Meeting.” There is something in this tune which affects the feet and makes them dance, willy-nilly; even the spectators beat time, and Mr. William Smith—he of the long heels—shuffled his feet noisily upon the judges’ platform.

At the end of the front row of spectators sat Mrs. Simmons, her fat face

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shining with excitement and pleasure. Owing to an excess of avoirdupois, it had been many a year since she had participated actively in a cakewalk, but she beat time vigorously and yearned to be up and doing most ardently.

Just within the open door, unnoticed and alone, stood Brother Noah Hyatt, like a skeleton at a feast. He pushed his rusty silk hat well down on his head and glowered severely at the company as he waited for the appearance of his particular lamb; he meant to rescue her before her feet executed any sinful tripping, and after that to address the assemblage generally. Brother Hyatt thought he could make some remarks which would be long remembered, and took a gloomy pleasure in his opportunity to note the faces of professing church members, now apparently given over to the world, the flesh, and the devil.

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The room grew very hot, and the band played on with redoubled energy. Brother Hyatt mopped his brow and shuffled his feet uneasily. He wished Lavinia would appear.

Mr. Smith held on to the large, iced cake, and looked carefully for the companion of his drive. The airs and graces of the other girls were lost upon him and the magnificence of their toilets wasted.

At last James Pollard and Lavinia stepped into position and saluted each other. She was dressed in the very best clothes her mother could collect from the washes of various surrounding families, and many young ladies, had they been present, might have recognized here a lace flounced petticoat, there a pair of red silk stockings and an organdy dress; over her shoulder she balanced a white lace parasol, and only Mrs. Simmons knew from whence it came. James

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was resplendent, with the inevitable silk hat and walking-stick adorned with ribbons.

Lavinia swayed her supple figure to and fro in time to the music and took a few steps forward, her head held coquettishly on one side. She looked extremely well, and Mrs. Simmons beamed with satisfaction.

The music grew yet more rollicking and inspiring, and the room became hotter. Brother Hyatt felt a film cross his eyes and could no longer distinguish faces; his body swayed with the rhythm of the tune and his feet moved involuntarily. Brother Hyatt had once been young.

Mrs. Simmons, dizzy and excited, had risen to her feet to watch the progress of her daughter. As Lavinia's slight young form swayed from side to side or bent far backward the corpulent figure

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of her mother did the same, and the heavily shod feet of the elder woman took as many and as dainty steps as did the slippered extremities of her daughter.

Faster and faster played the band; swiftly, and yet more swiftly, moved the respectable feet of Brother Hyatt. He shut his eyes and let them carry him where they would; he had no longer any will or volition of his own. Reaching the centre of the room, he became conscious he had no partner and sought to remedy this defect. He looked a second time and realized that a stout female figure was posturing opposite to him. Brother Hyatt felt no surprise. He held out his hand, and together they executed the figure which requires very high stepping, with the body bent backward as far as it will go. The spectators no longer looked at Lavinia and James Pol-

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lard. Mrs. Simmons knew how to cake-walk; she reached forward and removed Mr. Hyatt's silk hat, placing it upon her own head, and with arms akimbo danced lightly around him; he took several rapid steps, and, whirling round in front of her, fell upon one knee. Promptly the lady responded to the challenge by placing her foot upon his lap and gazing loftily towards the ceiling as he tied her shoe; then they again went forward, hand in hand, in perfect time. Verily, the "Georgia Camp Meeting" was responsible for much.

The band broke into the grand march, and Mrs. Simmons and Mr. Hyatt took their places to parade past the judges' stand, utterly unconscious of each other's identity. They followed closely behind Lavinia and James Pollard, but the tune was changed and the spell broken. Before they had crossed the

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room Mrs. Simmons, with a gasp of astonishment, had recognized her partner, and Mr. Hyatt, with a throb of mortification, realized what he had done. He made a great effort to rally his departing courage.

Mr. William Smith arose, cake in hand, as Lavinia approached. The hour of triumph was at hand.

“I renounces Miss Lavinia Simmons de spryes’ walkah in de room,” he said, bestowing the prize upon her with a low bow.

Lavinia received it with a simper, and was about to retire when the harsh voice of Mr. Hyatt fell unpleasantly upon her ear.

“Drap it!” commanded that gentleman in tones of authority; “drap it, I say!”

And Lavinia, taken by surprise, dropped the cake and her lower jaw

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at the same moment, much to the detriment of the former. She had been so much occupied by her own performance that she had failed to look behind and behold her mother and Mr. Hyatt in their triumphal course down the room, and therefore believed that the sword of justice was indeed about to descend upon her guilty head.

“I—I ain’ done nawthin,” she faltered miserably.

“Chile o’ Sin an’ Wickedness,” denounced Brother Hyatt sternly, “huc-cum yo’ in dis hyah place tuh-night?”

“Don’ yo’ ahgify wid de lady in dat tone o’ voice,” said Mr. Smith officiously. He felt he already had a proprietary right in that direction.

“Dawtah o’ Eve, sistah o’ Jezebal,” continued Brother Hyatt, addressing the trembling Lavinia, “cousin o’ Delilah,

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friend o' Jael, come wid me. Huccum yo' hyah?"

"Huccum yo' hyah yo'se'f?" interrupted Mrs. Simmons, thinking it time to interfere; "yo' done drug me intuh de dance, dat whut yo' done. De sin be on yo' haid. Yo' up an' make me dance, dat's whut yo' done. Yo's a double-faced ole sinnah, Brothah Hyatt, dat's whut yo' is, an' I's gwine tuh tell de Session."

"Peace, woman," said Mr. Hyatt majestically. He then turned to Mr. Smith, who appeared deeply interested in the scene.

"Young man," he said warningly, "let 'em be. Don' yo' have nawthin' tuh do wid 'em. Dey 'ceives yo', an' dey timpts yo', an' dey 'tices yo'. Yo' see how dis ole woman cas' a spell ovah me wid huh wicked ways. I done come hyar tuh save huh dawtah f'om hell an' dam-

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nation. She ain' wuth savin'. Let huh go."

Mr. Smith began to weaken in his allegiance.

"I ain' noways anxious tuh git ma'ied nohow," he said slowly.

"De fall o' man," said Mr. Hyatt, "am due to woman. She hel' out de aipple an' he tuck it an' bit it. Hit tuhn tuh ashes in he mouf. I's a membah o' de Session, an' 'caze o' a woman an' de spell she tuk an' cas' I up an' back-slid like yo' seen dis night. Dey ain' no tellin' whut dat gal gwine tuh do tuh yo'."

The crowd pressed closer around them, not wishing to lose a word of the discourse.

"Ef yo' takes huh to yo' house," continued Brother Hyatt, with hand raised as though in exhortation, "whut she gwine tuh do? She gwine tuh set in yo'

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pahlah and fade yo' cyahpet; she gwine tuh eat de bes' paht o' yo' hog meat an' leave de chitlins fo' yo; she gwine tuh spen' yo' money, y-a-a-s, dat whut she gwine tuh do, she gwine tuh spen' yo' money."

"Ef yo's ready tuh go back tuh Poketown, Mistah Hyatt," interrupted Mr. Smith suddenly, "I kin take yo' ovah in meh buggy."

And the two gentlemen departed without a glance at Lavinia, who occupied herself in gathering together the fragments of the cake.

Mrs. Simmons and her daughter trailed along the road in silence; there seemed to be nothing to say. At last the older woman looked behind her. She thus broke the silence:

"Whut yo' done fotch dat cake fuh?" she inquired bitterly.

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“I reckon hit mout come in handy,” replied Lavinia with a giggle.

“Yo’ ain’ got nawthin’ tuh laugh at,” said her mother angrily; “yo’s done los’ ‘em bofe, dat’s whut yo’ done. Yo’s a likely virgin tuh be sho’. Whut yo’ gwine tuh do now?”

“Reckon I’s been an’ gone an’ done it,” said Lavinia, with a second giggle.

“Whut yo’ mean?” demanded Mrs. Simmons, her curiosity roused.

“Well,” said Lavinia quietly, “James Pollahd, he up an’ ask me tuh ma’y him las’ night an’ I done so.”

“Is yo’ ma’ied now?” said Mrs. Simmons with a gasp.

Lavinia nodded.

“Brothah Wiggins, he tuck an’ tied de knot,” she said quietly. “I wa’n’t noways sho’ how dis hyah night’s wuck gwine tuh tuhn out, so I done tell James ef he wan’ me he got tuh

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take me quick. He peahed tuh wan' me."

"Well," said her mother, after a moment's thought, "he a mighty po' runt fo' sho', but I reckon dem virgins would have took him ef dey had de chance."

X

MOSES, JR.

ALONZO shifted the baby to the other shoulder and sighed wearily. Sometimes the realities of life oppress us strangely.

“Yo’ ugly, yowlin’, black niggah!” he said fiercely, addressing his unconscious burden.

Mary Lizzie peered around the corner of the house and grinned derisively. It was solely the result of good management on her part that the baby had been thrust upon Alonzo instead of herself when their mother went to her work, and she exulted accordingly.

“Take good cyah o’ de baby, ‘Lonzy,’ ” she said officially; “don’ let nobody git li’l Mose.”

“Wunst I gits shed o’ him,” returned

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Alonzo grimly, "I's gwine tuh pull yo' wool fuh yo', dat's whut I's gwine tuh do."

Mary Lizzie stood upon one bare black leg like a reflective young stork as she rubbed it affectionately with the sole of the other foot.

"'Lonzy,'" she remarked suddenly, "'membah dat king Miss Hattie done tole us 'bout las' Sunday?'"

"Whut king?'" asked Alonzo indifferently.

"De one whut tuck en kill de fus' bawns," returned Mary Lizzie.

"He kilt de *babies*, dat's whut he done," said Alonzo with a sudden glimmer of interest. "I reckon yo' means Mistah Ferro."

Mary Lizzie nodded.

"Ef dey hadn' put li'l ole Moses out tuh sea, he'd done been kilt too," she said after a moment's silence.

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Moses of the twentieth century set up a mighty shout, and it took some minutes for his brother to pacify him.

“ ‘Tain’ no use wishin’,” said Alonzo gloomily when peace was restored, “Mistah Ferro am daid an’ gone. Dem wuz good ole days.”

Mary Lizzie came closer.

“De stuojents an’ de night-doctahs,” she whispered apprehensively, “dey up an’ takes babies f’om dey cradles an’ bodies f’om dey graves. Mammy done say so.”

“Mistah Ferro mus’ a-been a night-doctah ez well ez a king,” observed Alonzo, adding after a moment’s thought, “Mistah Raymon’ up tuh de house am a stuojent.”

“Reckon he mought like tuh git holt o’ Mose,” responded Mary Lizzie, adding unctuously, “dey b’iles de babies in

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vinegah an' puts 'em away in glass jahs,
same ez pickles."

"How'd yo' like tuh be b'iled in vinegah?" inquired Alonzo of his infant brother, with a slight shake.

"'Lonzy,'" said Mary Lizzie irrelevantly, "dey's a place down by de rivah wid a big tent, an' annymiles runnin' roun' a ring, an' yo' kin ride on 'em. Dey's a band whut plays awful loud all de time, an' peanuts an' sich."

"Real annymiles?" said Alonzo, his eyes growing large.

Mary Lizzie nodded emphatically. Her knowledge of merry-go-rounds was limited, but she was equal to the occasion.

"I's gwine," she remarked tersely.

"Me too," said Alonzo with equal firmness.

They exchanged glances of mutual understanding.

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“I’d hate tuh see de stuojents git li’l Mose,” said Mary Lizzie after a long pause.

“Whut yo’ say dey done tuh hide ole Moses f’om Mistah Ferro?” inquired Alonzo with interest, and Mary Lizzie repeated the story of the launching of Moses and his rescue by Pharaoh’s daughter to the best of her ability.

“Does yo’ reckon he gwine tuh fit in a woshtub?” said Alonzo after pondering deeply; and Mary Lizzie approved the suggestion.

A washtub was accordingly produced and a quilt placed inside it; the baby was then introduced to his new quarters, protesting vigorously.

“He legs do crumple up,” said Mary Lizzie disgustedly, after vainly trying to induce her brother to lie out straight.

“Let ‘em crumple,” returned Alonzo

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indifferently, "an' he'p me tote him tuh de crick."

But Mary Lizzie did not respond; womanlike, after suggesting the plan she flunked its execution.

"Whut yo' reckon Mammy gwine tuh say?" she asked nervously.

"Does yo' want yo' li'l brothah b'iled in vinegah?" demanded Alonzo fiercely. "Mammy done tole me tuh take cyah o' dis chile an' I's gwine tuh do hit. Take holt o' de han'le o' de tub."

"S'pos'n dey don' happen tuh be no Ferro's dawtah tuh ketch holt an' pull him out," suggested Mary Lizzie after they had trudged some distance in silence, "whut Mose gwine tuh do 'bout hit?"

"Well," returned Alonzo argumentatively, "ain' we got tuh up an' hide him f'om de stuojents somehow?"

"Miss Hattie say," continued Mary

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Lizzie, endeavoring to appease her accusing conscience, "dat ole Moses done been kilt sho' ef dey hadn' tuck an' hid him."

"Miss Hattie allus know whut she talkin' 'bout," said Alonzo conclusively, adding after a moment's thought, "she gwine tuh be awful pleased 'caze we 'membahs whut she say in Sunday-school."

And Mary Lizzie smiled—a long, slow smile.

The edge of the creek was reached at last, and they paused to rest. Soothed by the motion of his improvised cradle as it swung along, the baby had fallen asleep, and therefore failed to object as Alonzo waded out into the stream, pushing the tub before him. Mary Lizzie offered a last remonstrance.

"'Lonzy,'" she cried suddenly, "whut yo' gwine tuh do 'bout de bull?"

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"De *whut?*?" asked Alonzo, astonished.

"De bull whut rushes," returned Mary Lizzie firmly. "Miss Hattie done make 'speshul mention 'bout him. Reckon hit wuh 'caze o' de bull rushes dat Mistah Ferro's dawtah happen tuh light on de aidge o' de watah; spec he tuck an' butt huh. Dey ain' gwine tuh be nobody haul li'l Mose out nohow twell de bull rushes."

"Mistah Brown's ole raid bull wid de curly forrid am down hyah by de crick," said Alonzo, pushing vigorously; "reckon I kin make him rush mighty lively wunst I gits Mose tuh floatin'. Gimme dat long stick so's I kin push him out tuh de middle."

The tub finally reached the centre of the stream, and unconscious Moses floated peacefully along with the current, oblivious of his surroundings.

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Mr. Brown's red bull was quietly cropping the tender young grass in his pasture bordering the creek. He felt at peace with the world in general, and only the large brass ring which adorned his nose suggested what he could do if he felt so inclined. Far away on the very edge of the water a huge yellow umbrella sheltered a man and an easel; it also shaded a girl in a white gown. The bull had glanced in that direction once or twice, but the umbrella did not interest him; he supposed it was merely a new species of mushroom.

A shower of small stones and bits of earth suddenly descended upon his back, and he switched his tail impatiently as he grazed; the shower increased, and he raised his head deliberately. Dancing excitedly about him, now on this side, now on that, was a small black figure emitting shrill cries and waving a tat-

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tered straw hat in a most exasperating manner; perched on the fence, in readiness for instant flight in either direction, was a second dusky atom intent on continuing the fusillade from the rear. The bull was evidently annoyed.

A large clod of earth struck him directly between the eyes, and he charged impatiently at his tormentor, who promptly vanished from the horizon. There was nothing to conceal him, so far as the bull could detect, but the yellow umbrella on the edge of the creek, so he made for it at full speed, with lowered head and elevated tail.

“There is nothing so beautiful as Nature,” said the artist under the umbrella, addressing the girl in the white gown.

The girl, known in Poketown as “Miss Hattie,” acquiesced.

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“So quiet,” he continued, “so peaceful. This small stream now, with cattle browsing so happily upon its banks and that quaint little boat in the distance, is a picture in itself.”

“That’s not a boat,” said Miss Hattie quietly, “it’s a tub.”

“I always feel elevated and strengthened,” he continued, disregarding her remark, “after a morning spent in close communion with Nature. To the educated eye there is so much to admire in the smallest leaf. Even the little clouds——”

He paused abruptly.

“Well,” said Miss Hattie, “what of the little clouds?”

“I thought I heard something. As I was saying, even the little clouds have a significance of their own. In the water beside us I find——”

There was a sudden thunder of hoofs,

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accompanied by an angry bellow; something crashed through the yellow umbrella and raised both artist and easel high in the air. They fell with a mighty splash into the creek, and Miss Hattie shrank back terrified as Mr. Brown's red bull rushed past without seeing her and jumped the fence into the next field.

Gasping and spluttering, the artist rose to the surface and caught blindly at the first object which presented itself. It proved to be the edge of the tub in which Moses, Jr., pursued the even tenor of his way down the creek, and which naturally capsized immediately. Down went the unlucky artist a second time, and when he again appeared he mechanically clasped beneath his arm a small, soft bundle which squirmed unpleasantly. As Miss Hattie timidly peered around the trunk of a large tree, whither she had fled for shelter, the head and

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shoulders of her companion arose over the edge of the bank. He presented a very melancholy spectacle as he crawled slowly to terra firma with water dripping from his garments, his hair, and even from his eminently correct Van Dyke beard. Advancing with as much dignity as he could command, he laid his burden at her feet, while Moses, having recovered his breath, set up a sudden howl of indignation at the abrupt termination of his nap.

“It’s a baby,” said Miss Hattie slowly, “a colored baby. Oh dear *me!*”

The corners of her mouth twitched convulsively, and after striving vainly at self-control, she finally laughed frankly and unrestrainedly in opposition to the wails of the outraged Moses.

“I am glad you think it funny,” said the artist stiffly as he endeavored to dry his face with his soaking handkerchief.

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Miss Hattie assumed a sympathetic expression and approached the baby curiously.

“Why, it’s Moses,” she exclaimed, astonished—“little Moses. We must take him home, of course.”

She looked at her own fresh, spotless costume, and then at the drenched infant.

“If I go ahead and show the way,” she insinuated, “you will carry him, won’t you?”

“Not I,” he returned briefly.

“But,” she argued, “think of my gown. You are already wet, you know, and no one will see us if we go through the fields. Would you leave a little, helpless child at the mercy of a raging bull?”

“I see no reason to suppose that the —the animal will return,” responded the artist indifferently. “The child might

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repose in safety behind this bush and we could notify its parents where it is."

"You have a hard, cruel nature," said Miss Hattie severely. "I always suspected it. Unless you do me this slight favor (the first I have ever asked of you), I"—she paused to consider—"I will never speak to you again."

"I will do it," said the artist slowly, "on condition that you grant me a favor in return when I ask it."

He approached the suffering Moses and picked him up by the middle of his garments, as one would lift a kitten by the skin of its neck.

"Not that way," said Miss Hattie, hastily readjusting Moses, "you will kill the child. Don't you know how to hold a baby? Crook out your arm—so."

"I do not wish the little insect so close to me," he remonstrated, looking

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at his burden with disgust in every feature.

“Now,” said Miss Hattie, starting briskly forward, “I’ll go ahead and show the way. You needn’t walk too close; I want to keep my dress clean. Hurry, please; he is so awfully wet I’m afraid he will take cold.”

“I am wet also,” said her companion, voicing a self-evident fact.

“Yes,” she returned callously, “but you’re a man, and you’re going to exercise. Come on now. Be quick!”

The artist obediently moved forward like an automaton, and Moses, fearful of further disasters, squared his mouth for a last heart-rending howl. Miss Hattie looked over her shoulder and the glance was too much for her; she laughed until her strength deserted her, then sat down upon the ground and laughed again.

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“I am glad I amuse you,” said the artist bitterly, indignation in every line of his figure.

“I’m not amused,” said Miss Hattie hastily.

“Neither am I,” he returned briefly as Moses fastened both his little, monkey-like hands in the Van Dyke beard so conveniently near and clung on tenaciously, his head flung well back that he might shriek the louder.

“Pray, laugh,” said the artist, politely, vainly trying to disentangle his beard from the clutch of Moses; “don’t stop on my account.”

“I’m not laughing,” replied Miss Hattie in choked accents. “I never was more serious in my life.”

To prove this assertion she immediately gave way to a fresh paroxysm of mirth.

“I beg your pardon,” she gasped,

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“but I do wish you could see yourself. Oh dear me! I’m sorry, but I can’t help it.”

And when Miss Hattie laughed the world laughed with her, whether it knew the joke or not.

Alonzo and Mary Lizzie from their ambush behind the fence watched the progress of the bull towards the yellow umbrella, and the subsequent demolition of the latter, with an unholy pleasure. As Miss Hattie fled to the protecting tree Mary Lizzie sighted the flutter of her white gown.

“Look, ‘Lonzy,’ ” she exclaimed, “yon-dah’s Ferro’s dawtah tuh feesh out li’l Mose. She done come up outen de groun’ when de bull tuck an’ rushed.”

But Alonzo did not reply immediately. He could see the head and shoulders of a man rising over the bank and he felt

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apprehensive. The man seemed to carry a bundle.

“Hide yo’se’f,” he said suddenly, drawing his sister behind the post as a familiar wail sounded faintly in the distance. The children looked at each other with large, round eyes.

“De night-doctah done got li’l Mose,” whispered Alonzo; “I seen him come outen de watah.”

“Reckon hit mought a-been Ferro’s dawtah,” suggested Mary Lizzie hopefully.

“Do Ferro’s dawtah w’ar a beard and w’ite duck pants?” demanded Alonzo in a withering manner, and Mary Lizzie subsided.

The cries of Moses became louder and more imperative.

“Gittin’ him ready fuh de vinegah,” muttered Alonzo uneasily. “Whut Mammy gwine tuh say?”

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“Yo’ done it,” vociferated Mary Lizzie shrilly,—“yo’ done it. Yo’ tuck an’ put him in de tub yo’se’f. Yo’ done it!”

“Shet yo’ noise!” said Alonzo fiercely. “Does yo’ want de night-doc-tah tuh git yo’?”

“De fus’ bawns an’ de boy babies am whut Mistah Ferro an’ dem othah ole kings tuck an’ kilt,” returned Mary Lizzie comfortably; “de stuojents don’ hone fuh me nohow. I’s a female, I is.”

“Whut dat?” inquired Alonzo, a cold chill creeping up his spine at the fate implied for his unlucky sex,—“whut dat?”

“Dunno,” replied Mary Lizzie briefly, “but I’s one of ‘em; Miss Hattie done say so. An’ I’s pow’ful pleased I is,” she added emphatically.

“Le’s go home,” suggested Alonzo, the prospective expedition to the merry-go-round forgotten entirely; and they

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started to retrace their steps, leaving their infant brother to his fate meanwhile.

Miss Hattie, walking briskly across the field some distance ahead of her companion, perceived the two small figures headed in the same direction, but keeping close to the shadow of the hedge. She stopped and pointed them out to him, remarking casually that they were relatives of Moses, and if their attention could be attracted a transfer might be effected.

“Suppose you shout,” she suggested, “and if they don’t hear, you might run and overtake them.”

Alonzo and Mary Lizzie, trudging wearily along, lapsed into criminations and recriminations, after the manner of older criminals when their sin is about to find them out.

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“Yo’ hadn’ ought tuh speechify ’bout Ferro’s dawtah an’ sich,” said Alonzo bitterly; “allus stickin’ in yo’ mouf somehow.”

Mary Lizzie clung to her monotonous recitative.

“Yo’ done it,” she repeated in sing-song accents, “yo’ done it.”

“ ’Tain’ so nohow,” repudiated Alonzo forcefully.

“Yo’ done it,” chanted Mary Lizzie again. “Mammy tole yo’ tuh take cyah o’ de baby. Yo’ done it. I’s gwine tuh tell huh how yo’ up an’ made me tote de tub. Yo’ done it; yo’ knows yo’ done it.”

“I knows I’s gwine tuh pull yo’ wool clean out,” returned Alonzo viciously. “I ain’ fuhgot dat.”

“Yo’ done it,” began Mary Lizzie for the third time, falling a few steps in the rear of her brother, “yo’—”

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A faint shout was wafted over the fields; Alonzo turned and looked in its direction.

“De night-doctah!” he gasped.

“De co’pse o’ po’ li’l Mose,” ejaculated Mary Lizzie as the body of her brother swung into view.

“Run!” cried Alonzo, “he’s gwine tuh git us.”

And the children flew blindly in different directions as the artist, bent on relinquishing Moses, started towards them on the double quick.

The course of Mary Lizzie led directly into a thicket of blackberry-bushes, into which she plunged head first, and lay panting on the ground firmly held by thorns. Her pursuer saw a bare brown leg waving uncertainly about, and promptly clutched the ankle-bone. Mary Lizzie groaned aloud.

“Lemme go!” she shrieked, endeavor-

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ing to liberate herself by a series of desperate kicks, "lemme go!"

"Come out of there, you little devil," said the artist between his teeth, pulling with all his strength.

"Leggo meh laig," wailed Mary Lizzie, "yo' don' want me. Leggo meh laig. I ain' no fus' bawn; I ain' no male chile. Leggo meh laig."

The opportune arrival of Miss Hattie probably prevented bloodshed on the part of the artist, and, explanations having ensued, Mary Lizzie departed for home, her back bent under the weight of Moses, a burden for once welcome to his sister.

"You see," said Miss Hattie, "they thought you were a medical student and ran away from you. I don't just understand myself how the baby got into the tub and out on the creek, but I thought it best not to ask many questions."

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The artist muttered something about infernal nuisances.

“I think it was so brave in you,” she continued, regarding him through her lashes with an admiring expression, “to rescue the poor little child. But for you he would have been drowned. It was positively chivalric, it was indeed, for you might have thought only of yourself, you know.”

And the artist said it was nothing, after all.

Mary Lizzie was seated on the doorstep ostentatiously dandling Moses when her mother returned. She told that indignant lady that Alonzo having deserted his charge, she had gladly taken the best of care of him all day. Consequently, Alonzo upon his return found his welcome unusually warm and himself deprived of the various tidbits his

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mother had managed to collect during her day's work and secrete about her person. He watched Mary Lizzie slowly disposing of a section of jam tart with bitterness swelling in his bosom.

"Awful good tahts, dem wuz," said Mary Lizzie complacently as the last morsel vanished.

Alonzo glanced furtively around. They were alone; his hour had come. He advanced upon his sister from the rear and fastened both hands in her hair.

"I done tole yo' I's gwine tuh pull yo' wool," he said between his teeth; "now I's gwine tuh do it."

And he took a good, firm grip and pulled mightily.

XI

THE BLAST OF THE TRUMPET

“DE daid,” asserted Aunt Janty Gibbs solemnly, “*con-tin-ually* do walk.”

“Does dey walk all tuh wunst?” inquired her grandson, Gabriel Gibbs, a youth with an unquenchable thirst for information on all subjects.

“No, chile,” returned his grandmother with a superior air, “dey walks sometimes in twos an’ sometimes in threes, but mos’ly dey walks alone in de night-time.”

“Dey’s a time comin’, Aun’ Janty, when dey’s all gwine tuh walk tuh wunst,” remarked Brother Eli Wiggins with conviction.

“Whut yo’ ‘ludin’ tuh, Brothah Wig-

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gins, whut yo' 'ludin' tuh?" asked Aunt Janty as she hospitably replenished his cup, while Gabriel improved the opportunity to slip unnoticed from the room.

"Dey's a time comin'," he replied, pouring the steaming tea into his saucer, "when ole Gabriel am gwine tuh soun' de note on he hawn good an' loud. Den de graves am gwine tuh bus' open an' de daid come fo'th tuh walk up an' down in de worl', tuh an' fro in hit. Y-a-a-s, Aun' Janty, dat's so."

Brother Wiggins paused and looked solemnly at his hostess.

"Aun' Janty," he said, his voice sinking to a sepulchral whisper, "dat time ain' so fuh off ez mos' folks b'lieves."

Aunt Janty paused, teapot uplifted, and looked at her visitor.

"Whut yo' mean, Brothah Wiggins?" she whispered in return, glancing apprehensively about her.

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“One night,” resumed Brother Wiggins impressively, “I up an’ dream a dream; y-a-a-s, Aun’ Janty, dat’s whut I done, same ez de wise men of ole. I hyah de trumpet soun’ de las’ trump, an’ I seen de daid come tumblin’ outen dey graves.”

“Laws!” ejaculated Aunt Janty.

“I done dream de same dream three nights,” continued Brother Wiggins, “an’ den I hyah a Voice; hit done tell me de time am come fuh de eend o’ de worl’, an’ hit done significate de night ole Gabriel gwine tuh blow he hawn.”

Brother Wiggins paused to note the effect of his words.

“Aun’ Janty,” he said dramatically, “*dis am de night.*”

“Is yo’ sho’, Brothah Wiggins, is yo’ sho’?” questioned Aunt Janty in awe-struck tones.

Mr. Wiggins nodded.

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"I's gwine tuh tell de Faithful 'bout hit at de sperience meetin' tuh-night," he responded, "an' I's gwine tuh tell de sinnahs 'tain' no use tuh lay low nohow, 'caze ole Satan he know whuh tuh look. Yo' ain' got no call tuh be skeert, Aun' Janty, yo' ain'. Jes' keep close tuh me when de time draws nigh, an' yo' kin slip in undah de tails o' my coat. I thinks too much of yo', Aun' Janty, tuh let yo' try hit by yo'se'f, dat's whut I does."

Aunt Janty looked much worried as her visitor departed, and made ready to follow him to the church of Little Bethel in a very perturbed state of mind. So troubled, indeed, was she that she entirely forgot her grandson, leaving him to take his chances for weal or woe alone and unprotected; she also overlooked the fact that her ancient father remained dozing in his armchair with only the

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shelter of a patchwork quilt to screen him from the eye of the Recording Angel.

“Wisht I knowed whuthah tuh b’lieve him er not,” she ejaculated, her hand on the latch of Little Bethel.

Now Gabriel Gibbs, when he left the house of his grandmother, repaired to a neighboring woodpile and, putting two fingers in his mouth, whistled shrilly three times. In prompt response to the signal sooty urchins of all sizes stole quietly one by one from the surrounding houses and assembled at the rendezvous. Gabriel eyed them severely.

“Is yo’ gwine tuh play Injun in dem clo’es?” he inquired sarcastically.

His followers intimated that they had no others.

“Git sheets,” commanded the leader, “an’ wrop ‘em roun’ yo’ bodies, an’

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take hatchets, er somethin', in yo' han's."

"Whut yo' gwine tuh wrop roun' yo' own body?" demanded Alonzo Burris in return.

"Go git yo' sheets," replied Gabriel loftily, "an' wotch fuh me tuh come outen de back do'. I's de Chief, I is, an' I knows how Injuns does."

Gabriel stole quietly back to the house, having observed his grandmother depart for church, and softly approaching his slumbering ancestor removed the patch-work quilt from his aged legs. It was an easy matter to pluck from Aunt Janty's turkey-tail fan its longest feathers and place them in his own hair, also to take possession of the tin dinner-horn which hung behind the kitchen door. A can of red paint stood in the wash-shed, and he liberally daubed it upon his round, ebony countenance with

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surprising results, and then rejoined his followers enveloped in the aforesaid quilt.

“Now,” said Gabriel to the ghostly band of white-draped Indians, “we’s gwine tuh lay down in de hay-fiel’ behin’ de graveyahd an’ wait twell de time come tuh set de bresh-heap on fiah. ‘Lonzy Burris, whut yo’ doin’ wid dat laddah?’”

Alonzo shifted his burden to the other shoulder but declined to reply, and Isaiah Bristow appearing on the scene armed with a pitchfork, the band of warriors proceeded to the hay-field to camp there until it should be time to set fire to the brush-heap.

Brother Wiggins concluded his impassioned discourse and resumed his seat. He had spoken for fully two hours and, with hymns and prayers introduced

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by various members of the congregation, the service had lasted until almost eleven o'clock. An air of excitement pervaded the assembled company and they lingered in the building, apparently unwilling to venture from beneath the sheltering roof of Little Bethel. Brother Noah Hyatt rose to make a few remarks:

“Meh brothahs an’ meh sistahs,” he began solemnly, “yo’ done hyah whut Brothah Wiggins say. De eend o’ de worl’ am comin’ dis hyah night; de good folks am gwine tuh flap dey wings in glory, an’ de bad folks tuh roas’ on de gridiron o’ ole Satan.”

“A-a-men,” ejaculated Mr. Samuel Johnson fervently.

Mr. Hyatt looked severely at the speaker.

“Whut yo’ givin’ thanks fuh, Mistah Johnsing?” he inquired politely. “Is

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yo' sho' whuh yo's gwine? 'Membah de one-eyed shoat whut Uncle William Staf-fo'd los' so pow'ful queeah; 'membah de jimmyjohn undah yo' baid; 'membah de fiddle yo' done play so frequent; an' 'membah dat pack o' cyahds in de pocket o' yo' blue ovahalls."

And Brother Johnson shrank back in his corner, silent and alarmed.

"Whuh, oh, whuh, am de good ole Moses?"

sang Sister Roxy Bristow in her high soprano voice.

"Safe now in de Promised Land,"

immediately responded the deep, sweet contralto of Sister Rebecca Brown, and Little Bethel rocked on its foundations as the entire assembly shouted the refrain:

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“By an’ by we’s gwine tuh jine him,
By an’ by we’s gwine tuh jine him,
By an’ by we’s gwine tuh jine him,
Safe now in de Promised Land.”

“Ez de Day of Jedgmint am so nigh,” resumed Brother Hyatt when he could make himself heard, “I axes yo’ ef yo’ all don’ b’lieve we bettah wait de soun’ o’ de trumpet right hyah in Li’l Bethel, wid song an’ prayah?”

“Whuh, oh, whuh, am Wres’lin’ Jacob?”

struck up Sister Roxy Bristow in reply, and again the night-air resounded with the refrain.

“Come wid me,” said Brother Wiggins, leading the way to the door and beckoning his flock to follow. “Out in de graveyahd am de place tuh wotch an’ wait. Come wid me.”

And with faltering steps and appre-

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hensive glances his congregation obeyed him.

Brother Wiggins and his flock grew rather silent as they assembled in the churchyard and cast stealthy glances at the dark shadows and patches of pale moonlight.

“Sam'l Johnsing,” said Brother Hyatt at last, pointing towards the corner where reposed the two former wives of that gentleman, “behol' Sistah 'Liza Johnsing an' Sistah Lucy Ann Johnsing; dey's bof gwine tuh raise up an' claim yo' fuh sho'. Which one does yo' b'long tuh, Brothah Johnsing?”

“He b'long tuh *me*,” said Mrs. Johnson No. 3, laying a convincing hand upon his shoulder.

“De Lawd on'y knows who I does b'long tuh, anyhow,” said the unhappy Samuel, his knees knocking together under him.

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“Brothah Hyatt,” admonished Mr. Wiggins, “am yo’ own life ‘thout no spots? ‘Membah de yallah meule yo’ done sol’ tuh ole Aun’ Judy.”

And Brother Hyatt became strangely silent.

“Glory, glory, hallelujah!” shouted Sister Roxy Bristow suddenly; “gwine tuh see Fathah Abraham dis hyah night. Glory!”

“Gwine tuh jine de cherrybim an’ pick de golden hahps,” chanted Aunt Martha Young.

“Gwine tuh sing evahlastin’ly; ain’ gwine tuh wuck no mo’,” added Sister Rebecca Brown with evident anticipation.

“Aun’ Janty,” said Brother Wiggins, “whut yo’ studyin’ ‘bout, Aun’ Janty?”

“When de graves do open,” said Aunt Janty abstractedly, “den I’s gwine tuh see meh yallah gal Mandy ag’in.”

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“So yo’ is, Aun’ Janty, so yo’ is. Praise de Lawd!” said Brother Wiggins fervently.

“Laws,” returned Aunt Janty regretfully, “I’s mighty sorry I didn’ put on huh blue silk frock when I laid huh away. She gwine tuh look pow’ful funny traips-in’ roun’ hyah wid huh shroud tuh kivvah de front an’ nawthin’ ‘tall in de back.”

“Ole Uncle Joe ain’ gwine tuh like hit nohow ‘caze we done sent him tuh glory dat a-way ef he run ag’in Brothah Wiggins walkin’ de golden streets in he shiny silk hat an’ black pants,” rejoined Aunt Martha Young in troubled accents.

“Oh,” exclaimed Mary Jane Finney suddenly, “I’s a sinnah! I’s a sinnah! Git me in, Brothah Wiggins, git me in somehow.”

“Me too, Brothah Wiggins, me too!” shouted an excitable sister from the rear,

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pushing her way closer to the front, and Brother Wiggins narrowly escaped suffocation as his congregation crowded anxiously around him.

“Yo’ done promise me yo’ coat-tail,” asserted Aunt Janty Gibbs, taking possession as she spoke. “Ef yo’ gits in, I gits in too.”

“De othah tail b’longs tuh me,” announced Aunt Martha Young. “Me an’ Aun’ Janty done stay by yo’ when all de res’ tuck an’ flop ovah tuh Zion; ‘membah dat.”

The knees of Brother Wiggins trembled obviously, in spite of his efforts at self-control, as the hour of midnight approached, and he huddled in the shadow of Little Bethel with his trembling followers and waited the blast of the last trumpet. And the moon shed its soft light impartially upon them and upon slumbering Poketown, unconscious of

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its doom. It also shone upon the amateur Indians, reposing comfortably upon fragrant haycocks, utterly indifferent to the day of reckoning surely in store for them, whether Justice was administered by St. Peter or their earthly guardians.

Gabriel awoke from his nap and jumped to his feet. It was quite time to arouse his band and begin operations, for he yearned to see the pile of brush in flames and to dance about it the war-dance so diligently practised upon the tow-path. So he felt of the feathers in his kinky little poll, and draped the patchwork quilt again about his person. Then, standing erect upon his haycock, his whole energy concentrated upon his task, Gabriel blew three blasts upon his horn.

“De las’ trump!” gasped Brother Wiggins.

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“Lawd ha’ mercy!” shrieked Sister Rebecca Brown.

“Speak up, Brothah Wiggins, speak up,” exhorted Aunt Janty, “show Mistah Gabriel whuh de righteous am. Speak up loud.”

Brother Wiggins struggled vainly to extricate himself from her detaining hand, evidently believing that self-preservation is indeed the first law of nature.

“Leggo!” he commanded, clutching wildly at the tails of his coat, which were firmly anchored from the rear.

Shadowy white figures appeared in the distance and silently advanced.

“De daid am riz!” ejaculated Brother Wiggins, falling face downward upon the ground; Aunt Janty Gibbs and Aunt Martha Young likewise prostrated themselves, the one on his right hand, the other on his left.

“Ef yo’ wants me,” said Mr. Samuel

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Johnson excitedly, addressing Mrs. Johnson, "yo's got tuh hol' on tight. Lucy Ann am riz."

"G'way, niggah," she returned, twitching her skirt from his grasp, "I's got 'nuff tuh do tuh take cyah o' meh-se'f; ain' gwine tuh tote yo' nohow."

The figures became rather more distinct, and the light of the moon fell directly upon the many brilliant colors in the patchwork quilt which enveloped Gabriel Gibbs.

"De angils f'om heav'n am come down," whispered Sister Roxy Bristow. "Yondah's Joseph; I knows him by he coat. Glory! Glory!"

Aunt Janty cautiously raised her head, but her grandson had passed and was replaced by Alonzo Burris, who still clung to his ladder.

"Praise Gawd f'om who all blessin's flows!" she exclaimed. "Mistah Jacob

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done fotch he laddah tuh he'p us climb up."

"Fathah Abraham," exclaimed Mrs. Samuel Johnson suddenly, "whuh is yo', Fathah Abraham? I's done ready an' waitin' tuh res' on yo' buzzom."

"Whut yo' talkin' 'bout?" interrupted her husband; "dis hyah am de buzzom fuh yo' tuh res' on. I goes whuh yo' does; I's yo' husban', I is."

"Tain' no easy restin'-place, yo' buzzom ain'," returned his wife scornfully. "I's gwine ovah to Fathah Abraham, I is. Yo' kin res' wid Lucy Ann."

And a dull, ashen hue overspread the countenance of Mr. Johnson.

Gabriel and his band of warriors marched silently in single file across the back of the churchyard to the brush-heap in the adjoining field; they then produced matches and set fire to it in various places. The wood was old,

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rotten, and very dry; it therefore burned quickly and fiercely, much to the delight of the incendiaries. A row of tall pine-trees formed a dark background against which the flames shone with a lurid and startling effect.

“De gates ob Hell am open wide!” shrieked Mary Jane Finney, pointing a trembling finger at the blazing pile.

Brother Wiggins raised himself slowly to his knees; Aunt Janty Gibbs and Aunt Martha Young did likewise. They were firm in their determination to reproduce his slightest movement, thus insuring salvation.

“Pray, Brothah, pray,” entreated Sister Rebecca Brown frantically.

Casting aside the restraining sheets, the Indians started to perform the amazing and intricate dance invented by their Chief, giving vent to their war-whoop at frequent intervals.

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“De howls o’ dem in tormint,” said Brother Hyatt unctuously.

“Pray, Brothah, pray,” urged Sister Rebecca Brown again.

Brother Wiggins raised a shaking hand towards the sky; immediately the hands of Aunt Janty and Aunt Martha flew upward also, as though moved by invisible springs.

“Git tuh prayin’,” commanded Brother Hyatt sternly. “Whut we been payin’ yo’ sellery fuh dis long time ef yo’ ain’ no use now? Git tuh prayin’.”

Brother Wiggins tried to comply, but his tongue clove to the roof of his parched mouth and speech was impossible. Great drops of perspiration stood out upon his clammy brow and he mechanically drew his arm across it; the foreheads of the ladies between whom he knelt were straightway mopped also.

The terrified sheep of Little Bethel

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shrank closer together as the fire blazed yet more brilliantly. In its red light they beheld small black imps skipping excitedly back and forth, while the air was continually rent with shrieks, presumably of souls in anguish.

“I’s done been sanctified, O good Lawd! don’ yo’ make no mistake ‘bout dat. I’s done got ‘ligion in all de chu’ches in Poketown,” said Sister Roxy Bristow in an agony of supplication.

“Baptis’, Baptis’ I wuh bawn, an’ a Baptis’ will I die,” chanted Mary Jane Finney in quavering accents.

“Brothah Johnsing,” whispered Sister Rebecca Brown, who had long cherished a secret admiration for that gentleman, “hide yo’se’f, Brothah Johnsing.”

And Brother Johnson gladly availed himself of the proffered refuge behind

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her ample skirt; he had an uncomfortable feeling that his proper place was in the midst of the red fire, and the idea was unpleasant.

Gabriel was enjoying himself exceedingly. The feathers in his hair had dropped out one by one until only two remained; they, however, stood erect, one over each ear. In his hand he carried the pitchfork he had snatched from Isaiah Bristow that he might poke the fire. At last he mounted the fence, and standing on the top rail waved the fork about his head in the exuberance of his delight.

“Yondah’s ole Satan hisse’f,” moaned Aunt Martha Young miserably, “I know him by he hawns.”

“Lay low, Brothah Johnsing, lay low,” counselled Sister Rebecca sotto voce, “don’ git skeert.”

“W-w-ho skeert? Me? I ain’ skeert,”

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returned Mr. Johnson with chattering teeth, drawing the folds of her skirt closer around his crouching figure.

“Brothah Wiggins,” said Mary Jane Finney tearfully, “whut yo’ got tuh say, Brothah Wiggins?”

But Brother Wiggins had nothing at all to say. He could only lift his other trembling hand upward. Aunt Martha and Aunt Janty did not imitate this motion; to do so they would have been obliged to relinquish the tails of his coat.

“Dey’s a sinnah ‘mongst us,” said Brother Hyatt suddenly, “an’ Mistah Satan am on he trail.”

“Lay low, Brothah Johnsing, lay low,” whispered Sister Rebecca.

And Brother Johnson laid very low.

“Brothah Johnsing am de out-an’-outes’ sinnah in Poketown,” said Sister Roxy Bristow suddenly.

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“A-amen, dat’s so!” agreed Mrs. Johnson fervently.

“Brothah Johnsing,” said Mr. Hyatt solemnly, “yo’s wanted; say yo’ prayahs.”

“Lay low, Brothah Johnsing,” repeated Sister Rebecca, “lay mighty low!”

At this point Gabriel on the fence dropped his pitchfork into the graveyard and sprang after it. A general stampede ensued, and the congregation of Little Bethel seemed to scatter to the four winds of heaven. Gabriel, recognizing several familiar figures, gave a shrill whistle of warning, and the Indians dispersed swiftly and in consternation.

Aunt Janty Gibbs stumbled in her flight and fell headlong upon something warm and soft; she clasped convulsively to her bosom the tail of a black coat;

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while Aunt Martha Young, rushing blindly in another direction, clung desperately to its mate; the coat itself was nowhere to be seen.

Surprised at the silence which followed the thud of departing feet, Aunt Janty raised her head cautiously and looked about her. Mechanically she glanced at the soft substance upon which she lay; she looked long and earnestly.

“Nevah thunk I’d take meh patch-wuck quilt tuh heav’n,” she muttered, examining it carefully by the light of the moon. Something lay on the ground beside her and she touched it gingerly; it proved to be a tin horn, crushed flat from being stepped upon, and it looked strangely familiar.

“Jerooselum Jehosaphat!” exclaimed Aunt Janty as she removed a turkey-feather from its mouthpiece.

Aunt Janty sat motionless for some

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minutes, absorbed in thought; then she arose and folded her torn and muddy quilt across her arm, and gathering up her damaged horn and as many feathers as she could find started for home. On her way she encountered the brush-heap smouldering in its ashes; she stopped and looked scornfully at it.

“Mistah Clayton’s ole bresh-pile,” she muttered with a toss of her head.

As she passed the residence of Brother Wiggins the face of that gentleman appeared at an upper window.

“Aun’ Janty,” he said, “has yo’ done ‘scape f’om ole Satan? I done lock meh-se’f up hyah jes’ tuh pray fuh yo’, Aun’ Janty.”

“Hyah am de tail o’ yo’ coat,” replied the lady briefly as she hung it on the fence; “I ain’ gwine tuh need hit no mo’, nuh yo’ prayahs nuthah.”

“Ole Satan!” she said aloud as she

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walked on; “ ‘peahs like *young* Satan an mo’ tuh de p’int.”

Reaching her own house, she repaired to the cot occupied by her grandson. It was empty. She then re-covered her father, who complained irritably of the cold, and replaced the can of red paint on its shelf in the wash-shed; it had been overturned and its contents had deeply stained a pile of clothes waiting to be washed. Aunt Janty looked grimly at them; she then picked up the wreck of her turkey-tail fan and looked at it also.

Extinguishing the lamp, she opened the front door on a crack and sat down just behind it. She had thought out a plan and intended to execute it.

“Janty,” called the old man querulously, “com tuh baid.”

“I’s gwine tuh wait fuh Gabriel,” returned Aunt Janty grimly.

XII

THE INTERVENTION OF GRAN'PAP

“Gwine tuh Buck Camp, Sistah Simmons?”

“Well, I dunno hahdly, Uncle Ben. I 'lowed I'd be dah sho', but Vinny she's hopin' tuh go along wid Ike Lewis in a buggy, so dah's nobody tuh leave wid de baby, an' I ain't no hand tuh tote a baby w'en I goes a-pleasurin'.”

“Yo' bettah go, Sistah, yo' bettah go. It's gwine tuh be a great day at de Buck; de new preacher f'om down de State's comin'; dey do say he's a powerful zorter, an' I spec' he'll bring de sins of many home tuh 'em. We needs yo', Sistah Simmons, we needs yo' bad tuh labah wid po' souls aftah we gits 'em down on de mo'nahs' bench. Whut's a

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baby tuh a soul, tell me dat, Sistah Simmons?"

"Hit's got one of its own comin' on, I'll tell yo' dat much, Uncle Ben, an' whut's mo', I ain' gwine tuh leave meh baby fur no lazy niggah's soul."

"No 'fence meant, Mis' Simmons; none took, I hope. Well, I must be joggin'. So long, Sistah, so long."

Mrs. Simmons went on hanging out the family wash. Through the open window she could see her daughter, Lavinia, busily engaged in ironing a white frock to be worn on the morrow. Asleep on the lounge lay the baby, Violet Clare, on whose account Mrs. Simmons must forego the camp-meeting. Digging angle-worms for bait, near the wood-pile, was her son Isaiah, a sooty youth of thirteen years. She looked around on her assembled family and shook her head:

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"I sho'ly ought tuh be dah," she muttered; "I sho'ly ought tuh be dah."

"I's got meh frock all ironed, mammy," remarked Lavinia as they sat at supper that evening, "an' it do look mighty nice. I nevah seen a rale big camp befo'; spects maybe I'll git 'ligion."

"Ho!" said Isaiah contemptuously as he accomplished the difficult feat of putting a corn-cake in his mouth without cutting it; "ho! Yo' git 'ligion! All yo' wants is tuh go wid Ike Lewis an' w'ar yo' best clo'es."

Mrs. Simmons sighed heavily.

"Vinny," she said, "po' ole gran'-pap's failin' rapid. I was tole down tuh de sto' dat he kain' las' many days mo'. Po' ole gran'pap! I's all de chile he's got."

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“Laws, mammy,” cried Isaiah, “I seen gran’pap——”

“Shet yo’ mouf, yo’ limb o’ Satan,” said his mother, turning hastily upon him. “Ain’t yo’ got no mannahs? Settin’ dah gorgin’ yo’se’f till yo’s fit to bus’, an’ interruptin’ of yo’ eldahs wid yo’ mouf full o’ vittles. Keep quiet twell yo’s spoke to.”

“But, mammy——”

Mrs. Simmons glanced in an expressive manner at the mantel-shelf, on which stood a stout hickory switch. Isaiah had a personal acquaintance with that switch and judged it best to be silent, but he relieved his feelings by sticking out his tongue at his mother whenever she looked the other way.

“Vinny, honey,” resumed Mrs. Simmons in tones of liquid sweetness, “I does mos’ mightily hate tuh disapp’int yo’, chile, but I mus’ go tuh gran’pap

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to-morrow. I's all de chile he's got, Vinny, an' dah's nobody else tuh he'p him pass ovah Jordan. Of co'se, darlin', yo' mus' take keer of de baby fuh mammy while she's gone."

Lavinia remained silent from astonishment, while Mrs. Simmons resorted to her apron to wipe the tears from her eyes.

"Hit's a mighty sad 'casion fuh me," she resumed in broken accents,— "mighty sad. He's de onliest daddy I's got, an' he's passin' away fas'. Hain't yo' got nothin' tuh say, yo' unnat'ral gal? Yo' own gran'pap! An' yo' not willin' tuh stay home jes' onct an' let him die! But yo' got tuh stay, Miss, whuthah yo' likes it or not; so min', I tell yo'."

Experience had taught Lavinia the futility of argument with her parent. She doubted her grandfather's illness,

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but was afraid to say so, and merely relapsed into sullen silence.

Bright and early the next morning Mrs. Simmons prepared to set out on her errand of mercy.

“Good-by, honey,” she said to Lavinia; “don’ yo’ let nothin’ happen tuh mammy’s chile. An’ as fuh yo’, Isaiah, don’ yo’ leave dis yard to-day, an’ mind whut yo’ sistah tells yo’. I hopes I’ll git tuh po’ ole gran’pap in time, but I dunno, I dunno; I spects he’s gittin’ weakah ev’ry minute.”

Lavinia watched her mother’s broad back disappear down the road, then went up to her rooom, the light of a mighty resolution shining in her eyes.

“I’s gwine,” she muttered; “I’s gwine wid Ike when he comes fuh me. I don’t keer whut happens, I’s gwine tuh de Buck to-day.”

She arrayed herself in her best clothes,

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then sought her brother, who sat on the door-step whittling, and deposited the baby in his unwilling arms, charging him to take good care of it until her return. Turning a deaf ear to his inquiries where she was going, she started off in the direction her mother had gone, and was shortly overtaken by a young mulatto with a fine new buggy, into which she got, and they drove off.

Isaiah sat on the door-step and held the baby. He had no love for babies at any time, but to-day they seemed especially unnecessary. The Jones family passed on their way to camp; they were all going, even the little children. Isaiah pondered on the unequal division of the good things of this world. Aunt Sarah Dixon inquired if she might leave her basket, to be called for; Isaiah had no objection, so she put it in the kitchen. Two cronies of his own appeared; evi-

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dently they were not going to camp, for they carried fishing-rods and lovely tin cans full of earthworms. Isaiah had a tin can of his own out by the gate. He placed the baby on the ground and ran down to speak to them.

“Whuh yo’ gwine?” he demanded.

“Feeshin’; come along.”

“Don’ wan’ tuh go feeshin’.”

“Ho! ‘Fraid of yo’ mammy! ‘Fraid-cat, ‘fraid-cat! Got tuh tend de baby. Y-a-a-h!”

There was murder in Isaiah’s eye as he threw stones at his retreating friends.

Violet Clare on the ground wailed dismally, and Isaiah regarded her with an unfraternal expression.

“Well, cry den,” he said, “holler. Who keers ef yo’ does? Wisht dah wasn’t no babies in de world; wisht dah hadn’ never been none.”

Isaiah passed a miserable morning,

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but about noon his charge fell asleep. He laid her on the lounge and went out into the yard. The sun had gone under a cloud, but between the trees he could see the glimmer of the canal.

“Spec’ de feesh is bitin’ fine,” he murmured.

His fishing-rod stood suggestively near at hand; the very worms in the tin can wriggled invitingly and seemed to be asking for the hook. Isaiah dug his bare toes into the soft earth and fairly quivered. Then he went and looked at the sleeping baby; he knew she was safe for an hour or two why should he not enjoy himself? Suddenly an inspiration occurred to him. On the shelf was the paregoric bottle, known as “draps.” Many a time he had seen the child quieted by a judicious dose; perhaps if he gave her some now she might sleep another hour or two. He knew the

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proper amount, but, wishing to make assurance doubly sure, he largely increased the quantity and poured it down the throat of the sleeping child. Then he looked for a safe place to put her. She might roll off the lounge; the same objection held good with regard to the bed. He scratched his head doubtfully, but as he did so his eye fell on the basket left by Aunt Sarah Dixon. It was a straw hamper with lids opening each side of the handle, and quite large enough to hold the baby. Isaiah thought she might sleep very comfortably there. Somebody's laundry was on its way to the wash, but he had no scruples about removing it and placing a pillow in the bottom, on which he laid the slumbering infant; he replaced the mosquito-netting which had covered the clothes and closed one lid, leaving the one at her feet open for ventilation.

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“Nobody won’t know,” he reflected. “I’ll be home fust, an’ nobody won’t know.”

He closed the door securely, but when he got outside he leaned through the window and looked once more at the basket; then he applied his thumb to his nose, wriggled his fingers derisively at the unconscious infant, and started for the canal with a wild whoop.

Down at the Buck Lavinia was finding the camp not quite all her fancy painted it. She had quarrelled with her escort, and he had not come near her since their arrival; therefore she feared she would have to walk home. She had not been altogether surprised to see her mother, and much of the day had been spent in dodging her. Consequently she was not happy. Night approached, and as darkness gathered the woods filled with peo-

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ple from all over the surrounding country. She thought she would go and hear the preaching.

The speaker stood on a log in a cleared place about in the centre of the wood; behind him, in a semicircle, stood men with lighted torches which flickered strangely, casting lurid flames against the black background of trees. In front of him were gathered the faithful who had long ago got religion, and were close at hand to start the singing, say "Amen!" or "Praise the Lord!" in the proper place, and to comfort and exhort those whose sins had suddenly become oppressive to them. Prominent in this group was Mrs. Simmons.

Lavinia sat on a log and listened to the preacher:

"Breddern an' sistern," he was saying, "as I done tole yo' befo', I takes meh tex' f'om de Bible. Not f'om de

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New Tessamint nuh de Ole Tessamint,
but jes' f'om de Bible. Anywhus be-
twux' its kivvahs, scusin' maybe de Song
o' Solomon, yo' kin fin' it. An' whut
do it say? Tell me dat; whut do it say?
It say 'Be good,' an' it say it loud an'
strong. Does yo' want tuh go tuh
Heav'n? Ef yo' does, yo' got tuh min'
yo' mannahs. Whut yo' come hyah fo'
to-day? Did yo' come tuh walk ahm-
in-ahm wid Laz'rus? Did yo' come
tuh climb de ladder wid Jacob, an'
fight de lions wid Daniel? or did yo'
come tuh show yo' clo'es an' meet yo'
frien's?"

"A-a-a-men! Praise de Lawd!"
arose from the faithful.

Here an old man, in quavering
accents, started a hymn which was
taken up by one after the other of
the assembly until the woods rang with
the chorus:

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“Roll, Jordan, roll!
Roll, Jordan, roll!
I wants tuh go tuh Heav’n when I die,
Tuh hyah Sweet Jordan roll.”

“Sistah, will yo’ be dah? Dat’s whut I wants tuh know. When ole Jordan am a-rollin’ an’ a-ragin’, will yo’ be dah, in yo’ w’ite robes an’ wid yo’ crown o’ glory? I’s feared yo’ ain’t all gwine tuh be settin’ in de Kingdom tuh hyah Sweet Jordan roll when ole Gabriel am a-blowin’ of de las’ hohn.”

With a loud cry of “Lawd, ha’ mussy on meh soul,” Lavinia rushed forward and cast herself on the mourners’ bench.

“Hyah’s a po’ li’l lamb strayed f’om de fole. Sistah Simmons, will yo’ pray wid huh, an’ show huh de way home?”

Mrs. Simmons, whose attention had been wandering, did not recognize her daughter in the prostrate figure, so she

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bent over her and half carried her to a secluded spot near by.

“Po’ soul,” she said, “don’t take on so, honey. Yo’ po’ sinful heart’s strivin’ fo’ peace, an’ de good Lawd’s gwine tuh give it tuh yo’. Look up now an’ be thankful yo’ sin has found yo’ out.”

She forcibly removed the girl’s hands from before her face. For a moment the two sat on the ground and stared at each other, speechless. Mrs. Simmons was the first to recover herself.

“Vinny!” she said, punctuating her remarks by vigorous shakes, “Vinny! Sakes alive! Whuh meh baby? Whut yo’ doin’ hyah? Whuh meh baby? Whuh Vi’let Clare?”

Lavinia rallied.

“Mammy,” she said, “how’s po’ ole gran’pap? Was yo’ in time tuh he’p him pass ovah Jordan?”

“Lavinia Simmons,” said her mother

POKE TOWN PEOPLE

solemnly, "we's all sinnahs, mo' er less. Me an' yo'll staht fuh home dis instan' minute an' see ef any hahm's come tuh meh baby, an' ef it have——"

Isaiah started cheerfully home from the canal when it suited him to do so, untroubled by any remembrance of neglected duty. He was surprised not to hear the lamentations of Violet Clare as he approached the house, so went in somewhat fearfully and looked around.

There was no basket; there was no baby. Frantically he searched both house and woodshed. The child was gone.

Suddenly a horrible idea occurred to him. He had often heard his mother discuss medical students generally, and the various ways by which they got children and hid them in dissecting-rooms for future use. Isaiah knew all about

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these dark practices and trembled with fear.

"It's stujents," he thought; "stu-jents has got huh an' dey'll git me too."

Night came on, and he cast apprehensive glances at the gathering darkness. The lost baby and the retribution awaiting him when his mother returned were both forgotten, and he thought only of the dreadful fate in store for him. At last footsteps were heard on the path and he made a wild dash for the wood-shed, from which retreat he was presently dragged ruthlessly forth.

"Lemme go," he gasped, "lemme go. I ain' done nothin'."

"Ain' done nothin', ain' yo'," returned his mother's voice. "Whut yo' hidin' fuh, ef yo' ain' done nothin'? Whuh meh baby? Has yo' been an' los' meh chile? Quit rollin' up de w'ites o'

POKETOWN PEOPLE

yo' eyes an' tell me whut yo' done wid
meh chile. Whuh meh baby?"

"I nevah done it. Hope tuh die I
nevah done lef' de house. Stujents
come an' stole huh while I was gittin'
huh bottle fixed. I seen 'em hidin' huh in
de kerriage an' I hollered tuh 'em tuh
drap huh, but dey kep' right on, an'
dey's comin' back fuh me too. Oh
mammy, don't let 'em git me! Don't let
'em git me!"

"Oh meh baby," wailed Mrs. Sim-
mons, wringing her hands. "Oh meh
li'l, li'l chile! Stole by de stujents! I
knowed dah was trubble comin' tuh dis
house when I seen de cheer a-rockin' an'
dah wasn't nobody in it! I knowed I's
gwine tuh see trubble when de byhd flew
in de windah. Whuh meh baby? Whut
dey done tuh meh baby?"

Mrs. Simmons wept aloud in an agony
of grief; Lavinia joined her in a tumult

GRAN'PAP. INTERVENES

of regret at deserting her charge; and Isaiah howled loudest of all in vivid anticipation of future events.

Suddenly loud, determined knocking was heard on the front door.

“De stuojents!” gasped Isaiah, his blood turning to ice in his veins.

“Vinny,” whispered Mrs. Simmons, seizing the poker, “fill de dippah wid b’ilin’ watah, an’ when I h’ists de pokah fling it in dey faces. Dey done got meh baby, but dey ain’ gwine tuh git no mo.”

The knocking was repeated.

“W-h-h-h-o dah?” said Mrs. Simmons, with chattering teeth.

“Fo’ de Lawd’s sake,” replied Aunt Sarah Dixon, as she opened the door and walked in, bearing in her arms the missing baby. “Fo’ de Lawd’s sake! Whut de mattah wid yo’ all? Hyah’s yo’ chile, Mis’ Simmons. Rube, he done tuck huh home wid him in de clo’es-basket, whuh

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she was a-sleepin', an' nevah knowed it. He done fotch huh back twict, but dah wasn't nobody round, 'ceptin' Isaiah (he seen him kitin' off to'ds de canal), so he took huh home an' kep' huh safe all day. Rube done stop hyah as I tole him fuh Miss Molly's wash dat I lef' in de hampah, an' he found de baby 'stid o' de clo'es when he unkivvahed de basket. But she ain't a mite de wuss, an' so no hahm's done. So long, Mis' Simmons."

Dead silence prevailed after Mrs. Dixon's departure. The eye of his mother was on Isaiah and he quailed before it. Presently she said in a dangerously polite tone,—

“Huccum meh baby in dat basket?”

No answer. Mrs. Simmons reached for the switch on the mantel.

“Whuh yo' spec' tuh go when yo' dies?” she demanded. “Yo' done went off an' lef' de baby, an' tole me yo' seen

GRAN'PAP INTERVENES

de stuojents hidin' huh in de kerriage. Maybe I could ha' scused yo' runnin' off feeshin'; maybe I could; but whut I kain' scuse nohow is de lies yo' done tole me. Don't yo' know whut comes tuh boys dat tells lies? It's a wondah de good Lawd don't strike yo' daid. Yo' done make me b'lieve meh baby was stole by de stuojents, an' now I's gwine tuh make yo' wish de stuojents had a-got yo' sho' 'nuff. I's gwine tuh l'arn yo' tuh tell lies tuh yo' mammy."

Isaiah watched his mother and breathed quickly. He saw that he must act, and that at once.

"Mammy," he cried, "I seen gran'-pap down to de canal, an' he done tole me——"

The hand stretched forth to seize Isaiah's collar dropped heavily as Mrs. Simmons gazed from one of her off-spring to the other in a furtive manner.

P O K E T O W N P E O P L E

Then she suddenly threw an arm around each, drawing both into her capacious embrace.

“We’s all po’, mizzable sinnahs,” she said, “but meh baby am back all safe an’ soun’, an’ gran’pap am snatched f’om de jaws o’ death by de han’ o’ de Lawd, so we won’t say no mo’ about it, but jine in singin’ ‘Praise Gawd f’om whom all blessin’s flows,’ an’ take off our bes’ clo’es an’ go tuh baid.”

XIII

AT FIDDLER'S BRIDGE

“An jes’ at midnight at de full o’ de moon yo’ kin hyah de fiddle chunin’ up, and ef yo’ goes tuh de aidge o’ de bridge an’ draps a piece o’ silvah intuh de watah (ten cents’ll do), and sez ‘Come fo’th, John Thompson,’ sho’s yo’ bawn, chile, out he come an’ plays. Dat’s huc-cum de place tuh be called Fiddlah’s Bridge.”

Mrs. Bostwick held out her hand hospitably to replenish the cup of her guest, the Rev. Kinnard Brice, who shook his head doubtfully as he replied,—

“I sho’ly am ’stonished, Sistah Bos’-wick, dat a lady o’ yo’ refinery should b’lieve in ghoresses.”

Mrs. Bostwick bridled at the delicate

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flattery conveyed in this speech, but stuck to her point.

“It am a fac’,” she repeated solemnly. “My boy Mose’s yallah gal Jinny done hyah it wunst when she was comin’ f’om de Big Quarterly, an’ it skeert huh so bad she ain’t been hyah sence. I suddenly hates tuh live so close, but dey ain’ no he’p fuh it, so I jes’ stays in de house at sech times ez I think ole John Thompson’s roun’. Ain’ yo’ gwine tuh have no mo’ dis cawn pone, Brothah Brice? I done made it speshul fuh yo’.”

“I’s ’bliged tuh yo’, Sistah, but I’s had ’nuff fuh de present. I’s been studyin’ yo’ wo’ds, Sistah Bos’wick, an’ I’s done come tuh de seclusion dat it’s meh juty tuh p’int out tuh yo’ fuh sho’ dat dey ain’t no sperrits down tuh de bridge. I’s gwine tuh stop hyah on meh way f’om Camp dis evenin’, an’ yo’ an’ me’ll

AT FIDDLER'S BRIDGE

go down tuh de watah. Ef dey's anythin' dah 'tain' gwine tuh huht us,— me bein' sanctified anyhow and yo' havin' jes' sperrienced 'ligion down tuh de Buck, an' ef he shows hisse'f I'll zort wid him an' lay him low."

Mrs. Bostwick accepted this handsome offer somewhat reluctantly. She was honestly afraid to go to the bridge after nightfall, but under the circumstances did not see her way clear to refuse, stipulating, however, that her husband should not be told of the proposed expedition, he having frequently ridiculed her fears of the old fiddler and announced that he would not object to sitting on the bridge all night if necessary.

She watched the long, lank figure of the preacher disappear over the hill, then went into the house, where she encountered her husband, who was carefully depositing something on the table.

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“Dannel Bos’wick,” she demanded sternly, “whuh yo’ git dat watahmillion? Yo’ didn’ hab no money. Don’ yo’ fotch no stolen millions intuh dis house. Does yo’ hyah me talkin’? Whuh yo’ git it?”

Receiving no reply to this inquiry, she approached the table and tapped the melon inquiringly with her thumb and finger.

“Hit’s mighty ripe,” she murmured; “seems like a pity tuh let it go tuh was’e. Don’ yo’ tell me yo’ stole it, Dannel, ’caze I ain’t gwine tuh b’lieve no sech thing. Yo’ ain’ got ’ligion; yo’ picks de banjo, an’ yo’ plays de ’cordeen, but yo’ didn’t steal no watahmillion; I knows dat. Git de knife, honey, quick, an’ le’s begin.”

“Rachel,” ventured Daniel, when the feast was nearing completion and nothing but a large pile of rinds remained

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to tell the tale, "Rachel, was yo' washin' up tuh de big house tuh-day?"

"Yaas," said Mrs. Bostwick, ejecting melon-seeds as she spoke, "I was."

"Whut yo' fotch home?"

"Dannel," said Mrs. Bostwick righteously, "I fotch nothin' home. Does yo' think I's gwine tuh take whut don' b'long tuh me jes' 'caze yo' likes tuh set an' stuff yo'se'f? I's 'feared Brothah Brice am right, Dannel, an' yo's mighty onregin'rit."

Daniel sighed. Life was not so pleasant since Rachel had got religion some two weeks ago, and had, as it were, renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil. Formerly when she went to the big house to do the weekly washing, her ample proportions were covered by voluminous skirts containing many and deep pockets, one of which, indeed, was ingeniously lined with rubber cloth and

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could be trusted to carry milk and other liquids with perfect safety. No wonder Daniel thought regretfully of the evening meal as it used to be.

“Dannel,” said Rachel, a little later, “whuh yo’ gwine?”

He reached for his accordion in provoking silence, whereat Rachel’s wrath arose.

“Yo’ ain’ gwine tuh pick no banjo, nuh play no ‘cordeen in dis yere house,” she announced. “Some o’ dese days, Dannel, yo’s gwine tuh see de wo’d ‘Sin’ in lettahs of fiah right ‘crost dat ‘cordeen. Den yo’s gwine tuh be skeert tuh daith, an’ yo’ sperrit’ll be ez oneasy ez ole John Thompson’s.”

“Laws, Rachel,” said Daniel, “ ‘tain’ no hahm tuh play de ‘cordeen. Ever sence yo’ went tuh de Buck yo’s jes’ so biggoty dey’s no gittin’ ‘long wid yo’ nohow. Yo’ got no eyes fuh nobody but

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ole Kinnard Brice, an' he don' do nothin' but traipse roun' de kentry an' eat oddah folks' vittles. I ain' got no use fuh him nohow."

"Hesh, hesh, Dannel," said Rachel. "Brothah Brice done been sanctified, 'an he's a preachah o' de wo'd o' de Lawd. He 'lows he kin lay de sperrit o' ole John Thompson low, an' it takes a mighty holy pusson tuh do dat. I ain' gwine tuh set by an' hyah yo' scarifyin' him wid yo' mouf."

"Huh," said Daniel scornfully, "who's 'feared o' ole John Thompson anyhow? Reckon ef he wants tuh play he fiddle he's gwine tuh do it 'thout no for'n interfluence f'om sech as Kinnard Brice. Now I's gwine out, an' I don' feel no call tuh tell yo' whuh I's gwine nuthah."

So saying, Daniel and his accordion departed, leaving the wife of his bosom

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to amuse herself as best she might until her escort should appear.

The superstitions of her race rose strong within Mrs. Bostwick as the hours passed and she sat and waited. The moon climbed higher in the heavens and shone as only the August moon knows how to shine. The silence deepened, broken solely by the chirp of a cricket or an occasional chorus of frogs from the stream at the foot of the hill, and the heart of the watcher grew faint within her as midnight approached.

“ Swing low, sweet chariot,
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Gwine fuh tuh carry me home.”

The familiar words, at first heard but faintly, gradually grew more distinct, and as the figure of Brother Brice appeared Mrs. Bostwick arose from the doorstep and, opening her mouth to its

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widest extent, joined loudly in the refrain,—

“Gwine fuh tuh carry me home.”

“Is yo’ ready, Sistah?” inquired the pastor.

He was an imposing figure to look upon, being clad in the gown in which he delivered his sermons. In its palmy days it was said to have been a gentleman’s dressing-gown, but its present owner had dedicated it to the pulpit. Set well on the back of his head was a much rubbed and rusty silk hat.

“Is yo’ ready, Sistah?” he repeated.

“Yaas, Brothah Brice, I’s ready,” she replied reluctantly. “I sees yo’s got yo’ gown on, Brothah.”

“Yaas, Sistah. Dis yere’s a mighty solemn ‘casion, an’ so I’s got meh gown. I’s gwine down tuh de aidge o’ de watah wid yo’ an’ he’p yo’ tuh cas’ out de

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debbil wuckin' inside yo' dat makes yo' b'lieve in sperrits; it's time we was stahtin'."

"Has yo' got ten cents?" inquired Mrs. Bostwick, seeing a possible loop-hole of escape. "'Tain't no mannah o' use tuh go down dah 'thout some silvah tuh drap intuh de watah."

Brother Brice had not; he said he rarely carried so much with him, as he did not consider it safe. This was an unforeseen complication.

"Hain' yo' got de mattah o' ten cents no whuh, Sistah Bos'wick?" he inquired plaintively. "Yo' mus' a-got paid fuh yo' day's wuck."

Mrs. Bostwick replied that she had a quarter, which she considered too much to waste, but not ten cents, and then produced a cracked china teacup.

"Dis yere ain' de time tuh higgle ovah money," said Brother Brice, re-

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provingly, as he deftly extracted four quarters from the cup, three of which he consigned to his pocket while the lady looked on helpless. “Yo’ll take dis quahtah in yo’ han’s, Sistah, an’ drap it in de watah. De oddah t’ree yo’ owes tuh de Lawd.

“Whut yo’ wants, Sistah Bos’wick,” he resumed, as they started slowly down the hill, “whut yo’ wants is *con’imence*. I has *con’imence* dat de Lawd’s gwine tuh take keer o’ me, an’ I gits all I wants. Many a mo’nin’ I dunno whuh I’s gwine tuh git meh dinnah nuh meh sup-pah, but I has *con’imence*, an’ it’s sho’ tuh come somehow.”

“Yaas, Brothah,” said Mrs. Bostwick dutifully.

Meanwhile Daniel had spent the evening playing the accordion to a select party of friends in the village of St.

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Georges (known as "Sin'goges"), and it was quite eleven o'clock before he started home. Having a long distance to walk, he decided to take a short cut across the fields. He was feeling moderately happy, his friends having expressed their appreciation of his playing by sundry glasses of applejack, which Daniel was wont to say brought music to his heart and skill to his fingers. So he went cheerfully and swiftly along until he approached the region of Fiddler's Bridge.

Here he reduced his speed and looked apprehensively about. He was no coward, and when safe at home had often been heard to laugh loudly at those who feared the spirit of the murdered fiddler, but it took a brave man to cross that bridge after ten or eleven o'clock, and Daniel knew it must be nearing midnight.

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At last a brilliant idea occurred to him; he would not have to go over the bridge at all. Farther down the stream were stones which might, in an emergency, be used as stepping-stones; he would go that way, since cross he must to reach home. The water was not deep; if he fell in, he could easily wade out again.

“I ain’ gwine tuh look to’ds de bridge nohow,” he muttered, “an’ den even ef ole John Thompson is a-walkin’ I won’ see him.”

Daniel took his courage in both hands as he slowly made his way through the tangle of briars that bordered the stream. The road was obscured by the bushes and thick festoons of wild grape-vines which hung from the trees, filling the night air with fragrance.

A dry twig snapped loudly as he stepped upon it.

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“ ‘Peahs like I kain’ go ‘cross no-how,’ ” he gasped, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

Suddenly he remembered his accordion, and opening it began to play softly to give himself courage. Still playing, he started over the stepping-stones with his head turned resolutely away from the bridge. Just as he reached the middle of the stream he heard a loud splash, as of a heavy body striking the water. Involuntarily he turned his head; plainly visible in the moonlight were the white walls on each side of the bridge, and the road leading up the hill; also clearly to be seen was a man running up that road with a truly remarkable speed. But what was that rising out of the water in the shadow of the bridge? Daniel’s blood fairly congealed as he stood poised on the slippery stone and watched a large, dark figure rise from

AT FIDDLER'S BRIDGE

the water. It moved. It stood erect, and, turning slowly, faced him.

Flesh and blood could stand no more. Daniel cast his cherished accordion wildly from him and started to flee, but, unfortunately, slipped on the wet stone and precipitated himself full length in the stream. In the water, where old John Thompson reigned supreme, what might not happen to him? With chattering teeth and trembling limbs he managed to crawl to the bank, then, without pausing to look behind him, started for home at the top of his speed.

“Does yo’ feel grace a-swellin’ in yo’ buzzom, Sistah?” inquired Brother Brice as they slowly approached the bridge.

Mrs. Bostwick did not reply, speech having for the time deserted her, and they went on in silence.

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They stood for a moment on the bridge casting apprehensive glances down the stream, which shone beneath them like a silver ribbon, with dark shadows in places, and drooping water-lilies whose leaves glistened in the moonlight.

“Is yo’ ‘feared, Sistah?” whispered Brother Brice rather faintly. “I ain’ gwine tuh make yo’ do nothin’ ag’in yo’ will. Ef yo’ po’ shrinkin’ haht’s a-failin’ yo’ an’ yo’s bent an’ boun’ on tuhnin’ home, I’s gwine wid yo’ tuh take keer o’ yo’. I ain’ gwine tuh leave yo’ to yo’se’f nohow.”

But Mrs. Bostwick shook her head. She did not intend to be reproached hereafter for putting her hand to the plough and looking back.

“Den, Sistah, have con’imence. Have con’imence on me an’ de Lawd, we’s gwine tuh pull yo’ thro’. Come close tuh de side o’ de bridge, Sistah.”

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Approaching the low railing, they looked over. The water was not far below, and to their excited imagination seemed to quiver strangely.

“Projec’ yo’ body clean ovah de railin’, Sistah,” was the next command, “so’s we kin see undah de bridge.”

Obediently she leaned over as far as possible, his hand resting upon her shoulder, evidently meant to inspire confidence, but very cold and trembling violently.

“W—whut I got tuh say?” he whispered.

“ ‘Come fo’th, John Thompson,’ ” she replied in trembling accents.

“Drap yo’ quahtah,” he said.

The bit of silver flashed in the moonlight and fell into the water, making widening circles.

“Come fo’th, J—John T—T—Thompson,” he called, beginning loudly and

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boldly, but ending with a faint quaver, a chilly feeling passing over him.

Very softly on the night air came the sound of music. Too petrified to move, they remained leaning far over the railing, looking and listening. The music grew louder; then some distance below the bridge but quite distinct and plainly visible appeared the figure of a man, moving slowly and playing upon some instrument.

The tongue of the Rev. Kinnard, becoming parched and dry, clove to the roof of his mouth as he tried in vain to speak. He grew dizzy and clutched his companion for support; he felt himself slipping; in another moment he would be in the water. Rallying all his strength, he clung to the stout shoulder beside him and pulled himself up by it, then, suddenly and violently pushing it from him, turned and fled up the road.

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A splashing sound, as of something falling into the water, pursued him, and had he paused to look back he would have seen that the bridge stood alone and unoccupied in the moonlight. But he did not pause.

“Lawd ha’ mussy,” groaned Mrs. Bostwick as she struck the water.

To her intense surprise, she was not immediately seized and drawn down by the avenging ghost of John Thompson, nor did she hear the voice of Brother Brice quelling the evil spirit. Instead, swiftly flying footsteps were distinctly audible, growing rapidly fainter. Mrs. Bostwick struggled to her feet and looked up the road.

“Humph!” she ejaculated.

The discomfort of her present condition and the difficulty of getting on dry land seemed to overcome her fear, so

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she looked boldly down the stream. The spirit had disappeared, but a dusky figure could be seen scrambling wildly up the bank and vanishing in the bushes. There was a light triangular patch on the seat of the dark trousers which looked strangely familiar to Mrs. Bostwick.

Wading wearily along, the water up to her shoulders and occasionally filling her ears, she encountered a hard object floating towards her. It proved to be an accordion.

“ ‘Peahs like I’s saw dis afore,’ ” she muttered.

Two dripping figures met on the threshold of the Bostwick homestead.

“ Dannel,” said one, “ huccum yo’ tuh git so wet? ”

“ Well, Rachel,” replied the other, “ jes’ ez I was a-comin’ tuh de bridge,

AT FIDDLER'S BRIDGE

I seen a bullfrog a-settin' on de bank
a-winkin' at me, an' knowin' yo' was
parshul tuh frogs' legs I struv' tuh git
him fuh yo' bre'kfus', honey, an' so
doin' fell intuh de watah. Ain' yo'
kinder damp yo'se'f, Rachel?"

"Dannel," she replied solemnly, "ez
I was a-strollin' by de stream in de
moonlight, I seen yo' 'cordeen in de
watah, an' in tryin' tuh feesh it out I
done got in up tuh meh neck. Dat's all,
Dannel."

The following Sunday Brother Brice
preached his famous sermon on "Con-
'imence," taking for a general text the
power of the righteous to cast out devils.
Mrs. Bostwick, who was present, was
observed to sniff scornfully several
times, and finally left the church.

Next morning when she prepared to
go and do the washing at the big house,

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Daniel, much to his inward satisfaction, saw her array herself again in the gown of many pockets. She patted the one lined with rubber affectionately.

“I’s gwine tuh fotch yo’ home sumpin’ nice fuh yo’ suppah, honey,” she remarked.

THE END



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